

FACES OF RECOVERY

Stories of Victory



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SINCE 1996

A special thanks to the RU editorial team for tirelessly working to produce this product with us:
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Introduction

In the spring of 2000, Dr. Paul Kingsbury came for a men's retreat to the church where I was a full-time staff evangelist. It was at this retreat where he preached, for the very first time, a series of sermons on "*Such Were Some of You*" from 1 Corinthians 6:11. My heart was immediately sparked with interest; I wanted to positively influence people caught in the snares of the devil. Shortly thereafter, I had the opportunity and incredible blessing to start one of the first RU chapters outside of Rockford. It was then that God began to "connect some dots" in my life. He showed me how I had self-righteously responded to my younger brother, who years earlier had struggled with addiction. These "dots" also began cultivating another desire in my heart. As a preacher, I didn't only want to know how to enunciate the spirit-filled life, but I longed to be able exemplify it in a way that would impact others.

The RU ministry was exactly what God had in mind to begin a work in and through me that I had not yet experienced in my first 15 years of ministry. The curriculum, combined with the friction of helping addicts, tested me and revealed that I was following outside pressures and responding in the flesh, rather than walking in the Spirit. The "*It's Personal*" *Daily Journal* became a great tool in my life and the experience of walking in the Spirit using this tool began to empower my ability to enunciate it.

God moved our family to Rockford in December of 2002 where He has given us a "front row seat", watching Him change the addicted all around the world. This book is a small compilation of the thousands of testimonies we have heard, read in letters, witnessed at graduations, and received through emails. It is only a small sampling, but its impact is miraculous! Not only will you read about how God has used RU in the lives of addicted, broken down people, but also how it has helped those who set out to help them with God's Word.

Recently I read a book called *Sea Biscuit* by Laura Hillenbrand. This book was about a race horse with many handicaps, yet who became a legend on the racetrack during the time of World War II when Americans needed something or someone to rally around and bring them together again. The story reveals that those working with the horse had unique problems and struggles themselves. It was the following words which drew me so much toward this story:

“I guess in a way everybody thinks we found this broken down horse and fixed it, but we didn’t. He fixed us. Every one of us. I guess in a way, we kind of fixed each other too.”

I think I can speak for the hundreds of RU workers across this country and around the world (over 1000 chapters at the writing of this book in 2014) when I say that I guess we all thought we were going to help some broken down addicts and fix them; fix them with the gospel of Jesus Christ. But that is not what happened. They fixed us! As we reached out to rescue them, He “fixed us”. So in a way, we fixed each other.

Our prayer is that this book will encourage, inspire, and continue to motivate every student, leader, helper, director, pastor, family member, and church member to find your place in Galatians 6:1, *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”*

- BENJAMIN BURKS
INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR OF RU

CHAPTER 1

Steve Curington Story

This is the face of recovery that began the ministry of RU; and this is his testimony written by him two years after he started the ministry. You may have read it before, or even heard him preach his testimony as many of us have...but we encourage you to read it again. Read this one...Steve had no idea at that time what God was going to do with it...

My name is Steven Curington. At the time of this writing, I am 32 years old. It is the summer of 1998. I am free from the bondage of sin. Oh, don't get me wrong. I still sin, but I am no longer controlled by my former addictions. I find myself somewhat addicted to the freedom I now have in Christ. That's right; I traded one addiction in for another. Let me tell you how it happened.

I was raised in a Christian home. I attended and graduated from a fine Christian school. I attended almost every Sunday morning, evening, and Wednesday night service at my local church from childhood until adulthood. I had what most people would call "the perfect upbringing."

At the age of 17, I began to experiment with alcohol and marijuana. I was not extremely attracted to it. It seemed, however, a prerequisite for a good time. As I slipped away from church after graduation, I became more enamored with the world and those who enjoyed its vices. I began to drink on weekends. My friends were experimenting with cocaine, but I had a good job and wouldn't touch it. I used to tell them I did not need a crutch. I could have fun without it.

The devil began showing me the glamour of drugs: prestige, money,

power, women, and control. I find it somewhat ironic that those are the very things I lost in my struggles. At 18, I ingested cocaine for the first time. I was addicted within hours. I lost everything within just a few months. I would gain some things back in my daily struggles to overcome, only to lose it all again in a battle with my addiction some weeks or months later. This process continued for the space of ten years of my life. How could someone with such a good upbringing stray so far from God and his family?

At the age of 27 years, the Lord put me on my back again - literally, this time. In a drunken and drug induced frenzy, I pulled a friend's car out into the path of another vehicle driving 60 miles per hour. Thrown from the vehicle and dying with a collapsed lung that was filling with blood, I was heard by a nearby resident crying, "God, I don't want to die". This unknown resident called 911 and my life was saved. I hoped I would someday meet this woman.

As I sat in the hospital bed alone, I was visited by my former Sunday school teacher who encouraged me to read my Bible, since I was going to be in there for a while. I pulled the Gideon Bible out of the drawer and read about how I could "know the truth and the truth could make me free". I remember being taught in school that Jesus was the Way and the Truth. It suddenly hit me. If Jesus was the Truth, then the verse really reads that 'YOU SHALL KNOW JESUS, AND JESUS SHALL MAKE YOU FREE.' Wow! I was amazed. I felt like God had given me a revelation. I asked him what I should do, thinking, "You dummy, He wants you to give up drugs and alcohol TODAY." Instead, I was surprised to feel Him telling me to go back to church. I thought, "I can do that." I said, "God, I know that I am not capable of overcoming alcohol and drugs, but if You'll help me stay disciplined, I will go back to church." I committed to attending every service. Two weeks later, I left the hospital and visited the church of my youth, North Love Baptist Church in Rockford, Illinois.

I do not remember the Pastor's topic that morning. All I remember was that everyone treated me like I had never left. I remembered someone saying to me, "Welcome home, Steve." Even though I had

hair down to the middle of my back and most everyone was aware of my problems with drugs, I was accepted by those in the congregation who remembered me. That surprised me, and for the first time since childhood, I believed I had been shown love by someone other than my parents.

I attended virtually every service over the next three months. I even cut my hair and bought a suit. However, I continued struggling with drugs and alcohol. The thrice weekly sermons were taking a toll on my heart and life. I knew God was not pleased with my life, but the strongholds that Satan had on me were too difficult to overcome by mere guilt. The next Saturday evening I stayed up all night at a drug house. When I returned home that morning, I remembered my commitment to God to attend every church service. Fearing the judgment of God for my not meeting my commitment because of my addictions, I showered and went to church. Yes, I was still under the influence at that morning's service.

Oh, how Pastor was prepared for me that morning! He preached hard, right at me. He preached on Romans 12:1, 2. The sermon included sacrificing your life, changing your lifestyle, and correcting your thought patterns. I was hit hard by this simple but, oh so needed, message of Christian service. I went forward that morning, deeply under conviction. At the altar, I never cried so hard in my life. I told God that I could not quit drugs without help. Could He help me or send me someone who would? I remembered I Corinthians 10:13, how God promised a way to escape from temptation. I felt God telling me that He would grant that request. That morning I made sure of my salvation and dedicated my life to God. I presented my life a living sacrifice and I knew my old self had to die. It was almost New Years Eve, 1993.

Oh great. Here I am trying to live a Christian life and God allows me to be hit with a New Year's Eve Holiday - typically the best party of the year. That day at the Sunday evening service, the Pastor announced an all night church activity for New Year's Eve. I nearly jumped for joy. My first escape from temptation. "Thank-you, God."

I came that next week prepared for my first sober New Year's Eve in over ten years. I was excited. My excitement soon faded when I arrived at the gymnasium that night. It turned out the activity was not for the adults in the church but rather for the youth. The itinerary for the evening was indoor mini-putting, indoor batting cages, dodge ball, followed up by a movie from 5-7 a.m. of *Dennis the Menace*. Oh, brother! I knew of an all-night party at an old friend's house and so I bolted for the door. The Youth Pastor caught me before I could get out. "Steve, I'm short on adult sponsors. I need you to help me with crowd control tonight." I was stuck. I did not want to let Pastor Wilson down, so I agreed to help. You ask me, "Why is this part of your life so important that you must include it in your testimony?" That night, I had the time of my life. The movie actually put everyone to sleep but me. I was the only one who stayed up the whole night (of course, I had had more practice at that). As I drove home that morning, I actually saw two different vehicles containing friends of mine driving home from their party. Oh, the agony I saw on their faces! I knew what they must have been feeling. Oh, the happiness that immediately overwhelmed me. I was finally at peace with my Maker. I was a Christian; and God, rather than my activities, was bringing me joy.

My first act of service was to be the activities director for the Single Adult Sunday School Class. I did not see it as any real form of service. However, it took my eyes off of myself and turned it to others. As activities director, I scheduled a dinner for all the singles in the church to attend. There was a young lady by the name of Lori Kehoe whom I had not really noticed prior to the planning of this activity. I personally invited her to come to that next weekend's activity. She declined because she had to work that particular night. When I explained to my mother that Lori was unable to attend, Mrs. Lahre, the church secretary, told me that Lori had a crush on me. I found it hard to believe. Lori was beautiful; a pure Christian young lady who had never consumed alcohol or drugs. Why would a girl like her be interested in a man with such a troubled past, struggling present, and unknown future?

Lori and I first spent time together at a church picnic. It was there that I first asked Lori to go out with me. She agreed, and God became real to me. Only He could turn this girl's heart to such a wicked sinner. Lori and I dated for the next 6 months. I remained free from my bondage to drugs and alcohol. Lori was "it" to me. God had answered my prayer and given me a way to escape (I Corinthians 10:13). Lori and I were falling in love and thinking of getting married. Was this the girl that God had intended for me?

After that first six months, she invited me to her mother's home for dinner. I knew her mother; she also attended our church. However, I had never been to her house. That afternoon as we approached Lori's mother's home, I began to feel uneasy. The neighborhood in which she lived brought back bad memories. When questioned on my uneasiness, I explained to my soon to be fiancée that her mother's home was just across the street from that near fatal accident some 12 months earlier. You could imagine how astonished I was to hear Lori's mother explain to me she remembered that car accident. She explained that she had heard the crash in that night, went outside, and saw me moaning and lying on the ground. She went on to explain that the moans and sounds of impending death were too much to listen to. She ran inside and called 911. That's right! My life was saved by my future mother-in-law! I don't know if she is happy about that today, but she sure was that day. So was I. I knew then that the Lord was saving Lori for me. He intended great things from Lori and me. We married six months later.

Since that time until now, God has seen fit to raise me up and restore the years that the locust has eaten. When Lori and I married, I was toiling away at a \$7 per hour job. I had over \$19,000 in bad debt as a result of my past addictions. Lori and I committed to paying it all back rather than filing for bankruptcy. I asked the Lord to improve my income-producing ability. I had spent basically 6 years in the gas business, running convenience stores. I had no real experience at anything other than retail. Within a month of marriage, God gave me a job in a machine shop as a training machinist. The pay was over \$10 an hour. God was continuing to bless Lori and me. God multiplied

our finances and generated income producing opportunities that allowed us to pay off our entire debt load within six months. Without going into details, I can attest that this too was nothing short of a miracle of God. Lori and I committed to God and each other that we would remain debt free.

After Lori and I had been married for a year, God brought a family into our lives that requested that I share my testimony with their son. Having never done anything like this, I decided to write it down first. I would stay up late at night and try to remember all the things that I had done wrong. After struggling to remember all the bad things I had done, I felt the Lord telling me that He did not want me to tell the things that I had done to Him, but rather all the things that He had done for me. I did just that. The many blessings that God brought back to me was indeed like a mighty rushing wind. Over and over I was reminded of God's extension of love and mercy since I made that commitment on that altar that Sunday morning some 2 1/2 years ago. After completing my testimony, I asked my pastor for permission to distribute it to others with drug and alcohol problems. He agreed that it would be an effective witness and that my motives were pure. God had a big surprise for me that day. That Sunday morning, an old drinking buddy walked through the doors of our church. I could not believe it; my first soul winning opportunity! I could tell that Derrick was deeply convicted during the service. I approached him after the service. He had tears in his eyes. He was miserable. He knew it, I knew it. Worse yet, I felt it. All over again, I felt the pain of addictions. I soon felt the pain of rejection. I approached Derrick and asked him if he would like to give his life to Jesus and be saved from his sins and the power that sin had over him. Derrick explained his inability to trust anyone. He would not trust me, God, or Jesus. He could not. Realizing this feeling disqualified him from being saved; at least until he could trust Jesus to be his Savior, I gave him my pamphlet with my testimony and told him I would be praying for him. He thanked me and left. That was around 12:30 p.m. At 5:00 that afternoon, Derrick called me all excited. He explained that he had read my testimony and asked Jesus into his heart. WOW. PRAISE THE LORD! God had used my testimony to break down walls that not even our pastor

had been able to break down that day. God was putting my life to work for Him. I did not think God could use someone like me, but I was wrong. God only makes what is broken and He only breaks that which He intends to make. God reminded me that I had a responsibility to the lost and I felt Him leading me to help others that were in similar situations.

I went to my pastor and asked for guidance. That day, in his office, RU was created. Not by me, not by Pastor Kingsbury, but by God. He was giving me my marching orders and I intended to get busy. We put our pamphlet into mass distribution. Handing it out on street corners, social addiction centers, Christian businesses and bookstores. That class started with one woman and she attended for one week. I spent the next 6 weeks teaching to my partner in the ministry and a mother of an alcoholic. The next week God brought four people to RU. Two of those people still attend today. Though they no longer are under the power of their addiction, they attend for the benefit of others. I believed we were on our way to having a fruitful ministry.

RU was 6 months old when I received a call one evening. “Hey, brother, are you saved?” The man on the other end of the phone was Dan Arnold. Mr. Arnold was the owner of the gasoline company that I had worked for in my years away from the Lord. Dan asked to meet me for lunch and I agreed.

Upon meeting, I was made aware of Dan’s conversion just about 1 year prior to mine. I learned how he had given his life to the Lord and a friend had given him my pamphlet. He knew right away that it was me that was being described in the testimony, so he decided to contact me. We wondered if God had planned for us to work together. He had no position available in his company. I was content where I worked and with the path of our ministry. We decided to wait and pray for God’s guidance.

It was not long before God started to guide. Two weeks later with no advance notice of any impending problems, my place of employment laid me off. Before I could get to Dan to express to him what had

happened, he called to offer me a temporary position with his petroleum company. Dan needed someone to sell fueling accounts to businesses around the gas station he was building outside the city's airport. I agreed and signed a contract to work eight weeks in this capacity.

My first day of work was cut short with the birth of our first child. We named her Charity Celeste. Her name means Love of Heaven. We truly believe that if God could bring such joy to us on earth, how great must be the joy of those in Heaven. God began to bless my first few weeks at Ranger Enterprises. Six weeks into my eight week contract, God led Dan to hire me on full-time. That was two years ago. Since that time until now, God has raised me up in the company from a fleet salesman to property acquisitions, to Operations Manager and finally to the position of Vice President of Operations. Only God can be praised for this. You see, how could a drug addicted, alcoholic ascend from near homelessness to a happily married man that spends his days as a Christian business man, serving the Lord in a fruitful addictions ministry that averages around fifty people per week? Only by the Grace of God could this be explained. Isaiah 55:7 reads *"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him and to his God and He will abundantly pardon him."* I believe that on that Sunday morning, almost five years earlier, I realized that I was a wicked man. That day, I returned to the Lord and he abundantly pardoned me. Since that time he has shown me mercy and protected me from many of the consequences of my past.

My friend, this is what God desires for every individual. God may intend a special lady for your life; God may intend children; God may even intend a successful career. I do know this for sure - God intends to pardon you for your sins, you only have to admit your wickedness and return your life to Him. Asking Jesus into your heart will remove all the guilt you may be feeling from your lifestyle. Society will tell you that you only live once, you might as well enjoy it. The Bible warns us that we only die once and after that is God's judgment. If you are suffering from an addiction, I know you are not enjoying

your life. If you do not know Jesus as your Savior, you will not enjoy your next life. You've tried, now let God. Give your life to Jesus and let Him bless you in such a way that only He could receive the glory. Praise Jesus.



Now that we have heard from the International Director of RU and the Founder of RU, all other names will be removed so that all attention and glory goes to Jesus, for He alone is worthy of praise! Remember, at RU we don't talk about all the bad we've done, but all the good He's done for us! Let's read a few accounts of the transforming power of Jesus Christ...

CHAPTER 2
Local Chapter
Testimonies

Overflowing with God's Love

I am 54 years old. I have been in pain since as far back as I can remember. My mother had an affair with a married man between her first and second marriage and I was a result of that affair. She was always telling me that I was a mistake and “the devil’s spawn”. She tried to give me away to her sister, but her sister’s husband wouldn’t let her take me. I was always treated differently than my mother’s other kids.

I was age 5 when two of my uncles started messing with me. The summer before I turned 6 they molested and abused me; the pain was excruciating. Then they threatened to kill my brother and me if I told anyone.

To write down everything would be a book, so I will just summarize. When I was about 8 I got into a liquor cabinet and drank some. It made me sick but it also made the pain go away for a while. Needless to say, it started a lifetime of addiction to alcohol and drugs.

I ran away from home at 10 years old, which started my time in the “system”. For the next 8 years I was in and out of reform schools, detention centers, job corps, and foster homes. In one of those foster homes, the old man sexually molested me. I ran away a lot.

I came to the conclusion that I was put here for sex. I could never get close to anyone. Now I realize that I felt I didn’t deserve to be treated well or was worthy of anyone’s love. Sex and drugs were my way of life, an endless cycle of giving or selling myself away. I hit rock bottom living in a cardboard box. Spending time in a rehab program managed to help me stop “using” drugs for almost 16 years.

However, something was missing. I started using again at 49 years old, lost everything, and wound up in jail at age 53. That's where I finally found out what was missing - Jesus Christ! The hole in my heart that I tried for years to fill with sex, drugs, men, and material things is finally not just filled, but **overflowing with God's love!**

Once I was released, I began attending the local RU program. It has helped me to gain a peace and understanding that can only be found in Christ. The people in the program shine with God's light and make me feel loved and welcomed. For years, I never wanted to be around people who went to church; my two uncles were deacons in a church. But my RU family is exactly that...MY FAMILY! God is good every day.

I should be dead. I've been beaten up, raped, robbed with guns, bayonets and machetes, and overdosed at least a dozen times. But God had mercy. He has watched over me my whole life and He has a purpose for me. His Spirit is enabling me to love and give, in spite what has been done to me and what I've done to myself. GOD HAS ALWAYS LOVED ME!!!

Then Jesus Came!

I grew up in a small town in Kentucky feeling very dirty and ashamed after being molested by a family member for years. As a result I always felt ashamed, like it was my fault - yet I was mad at the world. I grew up in public schools, with the exception of my seventh and eighth grade years which were in Christian school. There I was taught about the Lord and accepted Christ as my Savior. After stepping back into public schools, my life began heading in the wrong direction.

I began associating with the wrong crowd and, at age fourteen, found out I was expecting a child. My father was running for sheriff, and what would that look like for his young daughter to have a child? My parents decided abortion was the only option. I became extremely depressed and felt all alone. I believed that God could never forgive me for what I had done.

My life continued out of control, and by age sixteen I was married with a son, expecting another. My husband was abusive and very demeaning. I left him five years later and met my current husband who was my rescuer. Life was beginning to balance out, but without God in it. My sister was killed in a car accident and I turned to drugs to heal the pain. It only dulled the pain and doubled my problems. My husband and I wanted a child and I knew if I were to have one, then everything would be alright again. After three years we had a daughter who went home to be with the Lord when she was eight days old. We were devastated. Nothing seemed to ease the pain and I just wanted my life to be over.

Then Jesus came! He rescued me, and gave me a reason to live! Through RU, I have been taught how to lean on God and have a personal relationship with him. My life will never be the same!

This Wonderful Place Called RU

I am going through another transformation, different from anything I've experienced before. I am gaining knowledge and wisdom of a different sort and am beginning to understand that I've been following a path that wasn't leading anywhere. Just like a hamster on a wheel, I've been on a repeated cycle to nowhere, expecting different results while doing the same things. I have been off the right path for a long searching for fulfillment, joy, happiness, and meaning, but to no avail. Something was missing; I had a hole in my heart, a void that no worldly thing, person, drug, or amount of drink could fill.

I kept noticing a church with a sign that read, "ADDICTIONS PROGRAM". It was like a spark of hope and somehow I knew there was something there that was better for me than the 30 pack of beer I was on my way to pick up. So I came, and even when I was still practicing my stronghold, I could feel something happening. I looked forward to coming to RU on Friday nights and then to church on Sunday. I met these wonderful people and wanted to be around them and a part of them. I finally saw that my addiction was causing me to self-destruct physically, mentally, and spiritually. I was empty, yet I didn't want to die.

Jesus has shown me there is better way to live an abundant life and to enjoy helping others, even if it is just speaking a kind word. I believe now that God wants me to live the rest of my life in His way, to feel "real" again, and to stay close to those who are also seeking freedom. The Lord is my Shepherd and I want to stay with His flock. **This wonderful place called RU** that I looked at in passing has taught me to want what Jesus wants for my life. I am at the beginning of what I believe will be a wonderful journey, as long as I stay on the path. Thank you, Jesus, for not letting me go.

A Passion to Preach the Gospel

I didn't grow up in a godly household. The extent of my church attendance involved funerals or weddings. I certainly didn't know anything about God, outside of the stereotypical stories I heard in school about Jesus in the manger. If anyone would try to talk to me about God as I grew older, I would probably run from the room. I wasn't sure what to believe, nor did I really care.

My original parents were married for 16 years before they divorced and married other people, divorced those people, remarried each other, and divorced again 6 months later. All of this happened by the time I was 15 years old. I never knew God as a child but I looked up to my parents in that light. They were my god, and when they divorced, my whole life came crumbling down. I remember thinking, "I wish I was dead, or had never been born." Very dark thoughts were constantly entering my mind.

At an early age, I discovered that alcohol was a great way to medicate my problems away. It helped numb the emotional pain I was experiencing and became a good friend of mine. As time went on, I discovered bigger and "better" things – drugs. By the time I was 25 years old I had tried pretty much every kind of illicit drug under the sun. I used anything to escape from reality; drugs, alcohol, pornography, anger, and isolation. But this only led to severe depression and hating who I was.

Over time, I developed a crippling addiction to cocaine in every form. I lied, cheated, and stole from anyone and everyone in order to support my addiction. I could never maintain a long term relationship with anyone or hold down a job because cocaine was my first love. I had become everyone's worst nightmare. Finally I reached

a point where I had nowhere to turn, or anyone to turn to. I had caused so much pain and grief for so many people. I had no choice but to get help for my addiction.

For the next several months, I was in and out of rehabs, homeless shelters, and jail, staying clean for short periods of time, only to relapse again into my addiction. While in the Salvation Army Men's Rehabilitation Center, I made the most important decision in my life. At the age of 40 years old, I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I thought my woes had come to an end, but after leaving the Salvation Army, I relapsed. Having nowhere to go, I again ended up homeless on the streets of Orlando, tangled in the web of addiction and crime.

A series of events led to my arrest and sentence of 20 months in prison. I was devastated, yet the Lord used this time to bring me back to Himself. I immersed myself in God's Word constantly, reading, memorizing, and praying. After my release, I had a hard time finding a job due to my criminal record. I allowed frustration and depression to take over and once again found myself in the hopeless cycle of street life, shelters, rehabs, alcohol, drugs, and crime.

The Lord has shown me so much mercy in rescuing me from my futile efforts to gain victory in my own strength. Many times throughout my life I asked God why I was who I was. Why couldn't I have been born in someone else's skin? Why was I born a stinking drug addict? But the fact is, I wasn't born a drug addict, it was a choice I made. I used drugs and alcohol as a temporary solution to mask the pain of shame and self-hatred. Every time I turned to drugs, alcohol, pornography, isolation, depression, or anything other than Jesus when problems arose in my life, I was rejecting Him and His sufficient grace. Now I'm learning to run into Jesus' arms rather than run away from everything. Running away solves nothing, but running into Jesus' arms can heal everything... and the only "hangover" is joy in my heart! "*Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" (Matthew 11:28).

RU has given me the stable family that I never had. This is an amazing place with amazing people. I've never felt so loved and welcomed in all of my life. RU is a safe haven for me to come back to every Friday night, and the more I come, the more I realize how genuine this place really is. God has allowed me to find a job, car, and home. He enabled me to complete a college degree in Biblical studies, has given me **a passion to preach the gospel**, and opened a door of ministry for me at the local nursing home. I have seen my mom and sister get saved and am thrilled to know we will spend eternity together in Heaven. When I think about all I have been through and what the Lord has rescued me from, I am reminded of 2 Corinthians 1: 3-4, *"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted by God."*

RU Works!

As I sit here watching the Beginner's Class video, the tears roll down my face. I praise God for this program. Our church has just completed Principle #9 on the first time through *Nevertheless I Live*. The people I have met and the problems they face have touched me beyond belief. **RU works!**

My addiction may not be as serious as drugs and alcohol, but it is an addiction nonetheless. Food. I look in the mirror and cringe, for my body is supposed to be the temple where God dwells, yet I do not care for it. How can I love God with all my heart, soul, body, and strength if I don't take care of my body? He promises to do so much and very often we take His promises for granted. The more I get into the Word of God, the more I realize that, along with those promises, He often asks us to do something also. "I will do this if you do this." Thank God for addictions, for without them, some of us would never have come to the Lord. And thank God for a way out, because we can do all things through Christ Jesus!

The “Model” Christian

When I first came to RU, I was in despair and felt like my life was out of control. I had been saved for 35 years, living a life that looked good on the outside, but inside was full of sin and strongholds. Throughout my life, I tried to figure out why I was miserable and defeated. I read many self- help books and went to counseling, and tried to identify the root problem - all to no avail. Occasionally a sermon would greatly touch my heart and help me see an area in my life that was wrong. I would go to the altar and vow to be different, only to get up without the first clue as to HOW to carry out that vow! Thus my life continued to be one of despair and defeat.

Oh, to people who saw me at work and church, I was esteemed as a **“model” Christian**. A pastor’s wife, Christian school teacher, bus worker, involved in music ministry, soul winning, in leadership positions, praying and reading my Bible faithfully, the list could go on. But where was peace? Where was freedom from self? Where were fulfillment, happiness, and love? What was the “surrendered life” I had heard preached for 30 years? These things eluded me and I was miserable inside, even while looking good on the outside. I asked again and again where victory was. “What is the real problem anyway?! What is wrong with me?!”

During one of these low points, a dear friend invited me to RU. Not even she knew the desperation I was hiding inside or the terrible strongholds that were choking me to death! She just knew that RU helped her get closer to Jesus and she wanted the same for me. Though it was quite humbling to come to RU, being the poster child Christian everyone thought I was, I really didn’t care what people thought anymore. I just desperately wanted help and RU seemed to be the last avenue I knew to try. On my first visit someone came

up to me and said, “What are YOU doing here? You’re the perfect Christian!” I answered, “What you see is not always what you get!” As soon as the Director stood to welcome visitors and briefly explain the program and what strongholds are, I was convicted. My heart was pounding so hard I was sure my friend could feel it! I KNEW God led me here!

Throughout the program, I learned what I had been seeking for at least 30 years. I learned to identify the problems that had robbed me and nearly strangled me. But not only did I learn WHAT the problems were, I also learned HOW to fix them. I was convicted again and again through the RU’s 10 Principles and the study of the fruits of the Spirit. I was shocked as I worked through the curriculum to learn that I had been living and practicing the opposite of every fruit of the Spirit! How could I have been so blind? It was humiliating to learn and ADMIT that my life had been controlled by pride, self-pity, self-centeredness, fear, anger, and bitterness for as long as I could remember. I had deceived myself through the years that my problem was because of other people and past circumstances. Through years of blaming, I had convinced myself that I was okay - it was everyone else and what they did to me that was the issue.

In His mercy and goodness, God began to open my eyes to truth and change my heart as through my journey in the RU curriculum. It was his longsuffering and love that enabled me to admit my sin and strongholds. His patience and gentle prodding has led me to where I am today. May He receive all the glory for the change in my heart! The journal has become a vital part of my life as I daily learn to meditate and listen to Him, rather than hurry through the daily reading. The way the Lord reveals Himself through His Word in new and convicting ways sometimes takes my breath away!

While my “spiritual surgery” was sometimes so painful that I didn’t think I could face myself, it was God’s faithful love, merciful compassion, and patient encouragement that made, and continues to make, it possible for me to keep allowing His Spirit to change and purify me.

Because of my self-righteous past, the study through *Tall Law* was very helpful. An awareness of self righteousness, and how easy it is to fall into a self righteous lifestyle, was a reminder that I needed. Learning to not just memorize, but really meditate on God's Word has been a vital key to spiritual victory.

I have come to believe that strongholds of bitterness, concealed anger, self-pity, and pride are more devastating than even substance abuse. I was crippled emotionally and spiritually for 30 long, helpless years! The devil had chained me to a life of "looking good" on the outside. What a waste! In learning the truth and how to live out the fruit of the Spirit, I have finally learned to live a fulfilling life with Jesus. As Steve Curington always said, "The Truth will make you free - *finally!*"

God's Power & Grace

Dear Drugs, Alcohol, and Cigarettes,
Good riddance! The past year without you has been the best year of my life. I don't miss you, I don't want you, and I never will again. You are no longer a part of my life. I hate no man, but I do hate you. I am taking drastic measures to keep you away from my family and me. I have never felt better. I am the healthiest I've ever been. I love my sobriety. I will keep it no matter what.

I know you will always be out to get me. Staying away from you will be easy. I have no friends that use you. I have no family that uses you. I have no desire to use you. You repulse me. If I do see you I won't even give you the benefit of a second look. You almost took my life a few times, and I thought about giving it to you a few times. You nearly ruined my life and cost me 16 years in prison. I don't blame you completely. Part of it is my fault. I chose to let you in to my life. I chose to rebel against what I knew to be true, right, and just. I chose to pick you up time and time again. However, you do know how to smooth-talk me, make me feel great, and keep me under your spell.

All of that's gone now. It's not about feelings anymore. I'm willing to suffer in order to keep you away from me and my loved ones. I'm making whatever sacrifices I need to make to ensure that. You're done! You have no place in my life, thoughts, feelings, or will. I am no longer powerless over you. My life is being managed by **God's power and grace!** I give Him all the glory and all the praise.

I would say it's been fun, but it hasn't. The bad times far outweigh the good times, and the horrible times really outweigh the fun times.

I know this isn't going to be easy. In fact, at times it's going to be downright hard. However, I'm prepared for those times. I have an

excellent support group called RU. I have a wonderful God; I have a great family, the Church, and my fellow veterans. So I have no regrets, no second thoughts, when I say, “Good riddance, and stay out of my life!”

An Empty Christian

At the time I began attending RU, I considered myself to be a “Christian”, yet I had no knowledge of the Word of God or any inclination of how to walk in the Spirit. Oh, I knew the classic Bible stories; Adam and Eve, Sodom and Gomorrah, Noah and the ark, Moses parting the Red Sea, etc. But I now understand that I was an **“empty Christian”** – one who wears the label on the outside, but is void of God’s Word and being led by the Spirit inside.

I began the “chore” of memorizing verses. As I began to study and learn them, the comfort and guidance of these verses began to remain with me. I found myself reflecting on a particular verse during difficult periods. Now I often find myself convicted through a verse I memorized which the Holy Spirit brings to mind. I am learning that one cannot have a relationship with God without getting to know Him, and the way to get to know Him is through learning His Word.

Now I feel the reality of His Spirit living within me. The closer I draw to Him through the Word, the more I sense His presence and hear His voice. The Lord is real and He is helping me learn to listen to Him! I’m grateful for RU because without this program, I would still be an empty Christian.

Awe-inspiring Changes

I spent 40 years of my life smuggling marijuana by airplanes into the United States. Although I served 20 months in the United States Army in Vietnam, my life could be described by 1 Timothy 6:10, *“For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”*

I was born again on Easter Sunday, 2006 and began discipleship through the RU Program. The changes God has done in my life through RU since then are **awe-inspiring**. I was blessed to be a founding member of a new church, went on a mission’s trip to Mexico, received a good job with raises, and my wife was born again two months before she passed away. Now my life can be described by 1 Timothy 6:11, *“But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.”* Praise God for His goodness and mercy!

A Sponge for God's Word

I want to thank God for bringing the ministry of RU to our church. We needed it - especially me! Although I was raised in a Christian home, I don't remember ever doing Bible studies with my family, praying together, or even my parents telling me how to know for sure that I had a home in heaven. My life was filled with sin, doing things that made me feel good. I asked Jesus to be my Savior when I was 19 years old but continued to live a life of sin and shame.

God gave me a wonderful husband who is a born again Christian. Through his example and leading, my life began to turn around as I began trying to serve God and not myself. Yet for several years I continued to struggle with anger, depression, and a lack of faithfulness to Christ. It was destroying me physically and spiritually, yet no one knew except my precious children.

It took a while for me to get on board with RU, but when I saw what God was doing in the lives of others, I knew I wanted Him to work in my life too. I began working harder because "I" knew I could help others in need. It didn't take long for me to realize how wrong I was! I was the one who really needed this program to teach me how to seek God and let Him change me. When I began studying the first Fruit of the Spirit, God humbled and crushed me. I realized that I lacked true love for others; my life was miserable and without charity. "I am nothing." I became **a sponge for God's Word** and took it and my challenge book everywhere. And as I continued through each Fruit of the Spirit, God humbled me and gave me opportunities to practice that fruit. He took away my depression, but I didn't even realize it right away because I was so focused on Him, RU, and helping others that I stopped worrying about myself!

Praise the Lord for the change He is working in me, making me a

better wife, mother, friend, and church member. He has taken away my anger, and for the first time in 38 years, I finally experience true peace. I am very thankful for how God has used this ministry to shape and mold me into what He wants me to be – for His glory!

From Detox to RU

The Lord has challenged me a great deal through the RU curriculum, teaching me how to live a Spirit-controlled life over a self-controlled life. He has revealed areas in my life that I was not even aware I hadn't given over to Him. I cannot control everything, and even if I could, why would I want to? Life is far better and much less complicated when the Lord is directing it!

After nine back surgeries and years of being on a host of narcotics and muscle relaxants, I have been set free from my addiction to prescription medications. Since I had a medical condition that caused a great deal of pain, I thought it was alright to take the medications. I did not believe I was an addict because I had a "reason" for taking the medications, ignoring the fact that I was exceeding the prescribed dosage and taking them for issues such as financial trouble, conflicts with family, spiritual pain, physical pain, and as an excuse for staying away from church.

While I was in a detox unit, my pastor discussed the forgiveness found in Psalm 51 with me. I studied the Psalm further, praying and asking the Lord to restore the joy of salvation that I had lost. I told the Lord that if He would restore joy to me, I would teach other addicts about Him. I asked Him to take this horrible thing I had done and turn it into something good for His glory.

After getting out of the **detox unit, I found an RU chapter** near my hometown. At first I wanted to quit because I was prideful and embarrassed to be there. I was ashamed that I had been a Christian for many years and attended a Christian university, then had become a drug addict. After a couple of meetings, I tried to quit but it didn't do any good. My leader showed up on my doorstep one day, and as I delivered one excuse after another for why I couldn't come, he found

ways for me to get there. I told him my truck was broken, so he came over and fixed it at his own expense. Then I told him my wife needed the truck to get to work and he said, "That's ok, I can come pick you up." I told him 40 miles round trip was too far to get me, but he said he didn't mind so, reluctantly, I returned to RU. Today I cannot praise God enough for that man. If it hadn't been for his persistence, I probably would have been back in my addiction and I would not have fulfilled the vow I made to God in the detox unit.

Today I have the joy of the Lord's salvation back in my life, my family has been restored to me, and I have my memory back. On top of that, I have been able to fulfill my vow to the Lord far beyond what I expected. When I told the Lord I would teach other addicts about Him, I figured I would occasionally talk to someone about God.

Instead, I teach the Beginner's class at our RU and occasionally lead the men's challenge group. This is a miracle in itself in light of my lifelong terror of public speaking. The Dean of Men at my college told me years ago that someday I would have something so important to say that I would overcome my fear. I didn't believe him at the time, but now I certainly do! I can't wait to get up to tell others about what God has done in my life, even volunteering to speak whenever possible. The Lord has definitely changed me!

I am so thankful that the Lord brought me to RU. He has given me a joy that I cannot comprehend, He has met needs that I thought were impossible, and He has given my life purpose.

Victory Poem

Praise the Lord for answering prayers and leading me to RU.
Because there I found the truth, the truth I never knew.

Praise the Lord for its challenge book
which became a wonderful source,
For submerging me into God's Word
which began to plot my course.

As I applied to my life what God showed me in his Word,
My life started to change and a new song is what I heard.

The sweet sounds of victories
in the first talk were all truly real.
Jumping and praising Christ's name
is how they made me feel.

A second talk with true friends about all of life's trials,
And the caring responses I received made me want to smile.

Through the third talk God began to speak to me.
The truth in Jesus Christ is what I started to see.

Praise the Lord for the people who serve in RU.
Words could never express the appreciation I give unto you.

When you get to heaven I hope there is a crown awaiting you.
You can lay it at the feet of Jesus and He will thank you too.

- written by a student after 30 Months **Victory in Jesus**

Circumstances & Coincidences

When I first came to RU, I thought that I was coming to support my son to make some necessary life changes and develop his walk with the Lord Jesus. That would happen, but not before the Lord first began a work in my life that I didn't even know I needed! Life was about to change for me in a miraculous way! Where the God of all creation would mold me and show me firsthand how only He can take evil, turn it around and then use it to bring good into a believer's life.

My son broke my heart when he left home. He rebelled against everything he was raised with and we believed. We were a Christian family, serving the Lord, and I thought that life was just about perfect! When he left, in my mind there was no way that this could ever be turned around and God could ever be glorified. Not this time, not this terrible of a sin!

Boy, was I in for a surprise! However, this was not going to play out in any way that I could have predicted. Our son came home, but about 6-7 months into the program, he left home again! The pain and agony I experienced was devastating as a mother. I was planning on quitting myself when he left, but due to several **"circumstances and coincidences"**, I soon discovered that God had a different plan. And, so I yielded to the Spirit's prompting and chose to stay on at RU.

It is then that God began to develop **me** radically. He was softening me, breaking me to a point that I was wondering if I could ever be effective for Him again. The pain was at times unbearable, where only my faith, coupled with determination to endure, to fulfill my promise to finish to Him, was what kept me going. I did, and He worked

supernaturally! I memorized scripture, spent hours in the Word and in prayer. I did Challenges, and I began to realize that I was growing so much closer to Christ. I never imagined this kind of intimacy with the Creator of everything. I could not imagine what God wanted with a middle aged mom that really thought that her days of service were over and that she had totally failed at the most important job she'd been given - mothering.

The Lord showed me over and over again that He wasn't through with me; that I wasn't responsible for my son's choices; and that His plan was not my plan. He had a different idea of what He wanted for me, my life, and the life of my son. This is when He brought me to the place where I realized that this life is not about me, or what I want, but it is ALL about Jesus, and what He wants for me, my life, my family and my son.

When I got to that place, and I submitted, yielded to the Holy Spirit, and surrendered, then my life was completely changed forever. Actually, I was now dead, and it was Christ Who was living and working, in and through me by His power through the Holy Spirit of God who now owns me! AMEN!

I owe everything to my Lord and Savior, Who gave everything for me! I'm eternally grateful to RU and Steve Curington for this program. I don't know what would have happened if I didn't have this place, but God in His mercy gave it to me.

It's funny, when everything in my life looked perfect to me and the world, it was really a disaster! So much less than God's best! Now that the world would say, "how horrible," yet I say "Praise the Lord!" Now I can honestly say, life is perfect, because I'm dead and Christ lives in and through me.

Small Testimonies... with Big Impact!

“If I would tell people my dreams they would get grossly tired of hearing them because they are never ending!” I wrote this quote of mine in a writing project sometime ago and each time I look at it I chuckle. Why? Because even though I dream 100% more than anyone else, **I never once dreamed that my life could change so much.**

Previously, I looked at other Christian’s lives and said, “I would never be so gentle and meek like them because I am too hot-headed!” When I thought that, I obviously didn’t have much faith! I had forgotten that if Christ could save me, He also can transform me.

“I am now almost thirty-two years old. I was incarcerated on March 5th, 2012. For the first time in my life, I began attending church. I have continued to go every week and also am an active member in the RU program. I have learned to read my Bible, and pray. I even have been saved and baptized. Christ has truly blessed me by opening up my heart to His love and understanding. God has forgiven me for my sins and taught me that nothing happens by mistake in God’s world. He has given me the strength to see the beauty in even the worst seeming circumstances. He has given me the inner peace of mind to allow Him to take my worries and know it will be okay. **God has made me into a NEW WOMAN.** He has blessed me with a wonderful Savior and allowing me to be His child. Thank you Jesus!”

God used the RU program to save my life and give me back all the wonderful things I thought were lost. To sum things up for you, before RU, I was homeless, addicted, and alienated from my family and children; I had lost hope, given up, and did not

care. I was living the typical addict life: stealing, drugging, and destroying my life and hurting everyone around me. Now, I am amazed at all the wonderful things that are happening for me. I have a good job, my mind and body are healthy, and I am living back with my family and children, who said they would never have anything to do with me. So, if you feel lost or have tried everything with no positive results, know that there is an answer!! **God has changed my life** and He can change yours also, because God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. The RU family helps addicts like me find our way back to God and guides us in rebuilding our relationship with Him.

Thank the Lord that after 10 years of a crippling drug addiction, I learned the answer... **TRUE FREEDOM** through a daily, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. I came to RU broken, guilt-ridden, and tired of fighting a then seemingly hopeless addiction to cocaine. It didn't take me very long to realize that a drug wasn't my problem. It was my sinful, rebellious, ugly heart. The heart of every problem is a problem of the heart. For the first time in my life, I submitted to the authority God placed over me. By doing this, I ultimately submitted to God.

As I do my Journal every single day, God speaks to me through the Bible. It is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword and as I listen to the Holy Spirit's voice, He shows me His desires for me. And when I delight myself in the Lord, He promises to give me the desires of my heart. It's not rocket science! As I yield to the Holy Spirit, He changes my selfish desires to His righteous desires and then He takes pleasure in blessing because it brings glory to Him!!!! I absolutely love it! It's REAL!!!!

I would like to share my appreciation to you and for you; and mostly, to give God all the glory for what an awesome work He has done in my life and the amazing path He has led me down (or should I say up)☺. Our ever-loving Savior had pity on this

poor, crippled, and suffering soul that I once was, but is now **transformed** thanks to His Word, work, and will that He reveals to me as I serve Him.

The Lord has truly blessed me. I have found my way back to my family and have **reformed bonds** with my sisters. Since then I have gotten married and [have] been doing really good. I thank the Lord everyday for showing me the way, blessing me with a great family and a wonderful husband. Even though I once was such a terrible person, they forgave me as I know He has. I thank you guys for this program. I am now 32 years old and have 2 ½ years clean. Only by God's grace was this possible!

God, through this program, has taught me appreciation, compassion, forgiveness, and humility towards others, which is something I never had before I gave my life to Jesus Christ. Since this program, **God has given me a new life** with a new family (church family). God loved me so much, He never gave up or ever threw me away.

It took me two years and three months to complete and graduate from the Stronghold's Discipleship Course. In every chapter of the book, God would deal with me on that particular fruit and where I was failing in it. Each challenge was literally a challenge and God used each one to teach me, correct me, and show me how to fix it and better myself for the cause of Christ.

It was during this time that **God restored my marriage**. My husband literally became my best friend. I began to submit to him the way God wanted me to. I began reading books on marriage written by Christian ladies and pastors. I fell in love with him on a level that I did not know existed and want nothing but to make him happy. God did a miracle in me and my marriage. The RU Program and curriculum has convicted me, taught me and blessed me in every area of my life. I am no longer the prideful, crazy-eyed, ready-for-a-fight, loud-

mouthed, stupid girl that I was when I began the RU Program. I am NOT perfect, but I AM changed!

I was addicted to pills for 11 years of my life and the only time I was clean is when my addiction led me to doing 2 years in the state penitentiary. I got out and swore I would never go back to the addiction, but that was a lie. Almost immediately I returned to my addiction, but this time it was on me stronger than ever. I ran up \$20,000 dollars in debt. I didn't have any type of relationship with my own family, including not even talking on a phone. I thought I was a good dad letting my son throw a baseball to me while I kicked it back talking on the phone trying to get more supply. I even pawned everything I could get my hands on to feed my addiction. "I hit rock bottom."

I joined the RU program reaching out for help because I couldn't afford it anywhere else. I thought my life was over. I honestly thought that I had messed my life up so much that the only way out was suicide. My addiction owned me. However, since joining the RU program in my community, I have been completely clean from all drugs, including a 15 year cigarette habit!

I now have a **restored relationship** with my family! My wife and I, though at one time on the verge of divorce, are actually growing stronger than ever through the RU program. My son received the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior during the RU program. All I can say is "Praise the Lord!"

A life that I could never fix has been given back to me. RU taught me how to trust our living Savior; have faith I need to keep going every day; and most of all, how to have a true relationship with a living God that gave me a life that I could have never fixed without Him. I thank God for letting me be a part of the RU program.



CHAPTER 3
Discipleship Homes

The Proper Tools

I am from Baltimore Maryland, the youngest of six children. We were raised by loving parents who were hard workers and good providers. Our family was active in our church and at a young age I accepted Christ as my Savior.

However, a series of events changed my life the year I was thirteen. Our family moved to a suburb outside of Baltimore, I began attending a new school, the youth pastor at our church left for the mission field, and the youth group disbanded. I was a thirteen year old kid in a new neighborhood that hated my school and had no spiritual guidance in my life. Then the devil made his move.

I dropped out of high school and began drinking and experimenting with drugs with my new found worldly friends. But after seeing several of them go to jail I chose alcohol, reasoning that it was “legal”. The next 35 years of my life was a blur. I married a barmaid and was an alcoholic. We lived a typical worldly lifestyle, working, buying a home, and indulging in our sin. The problem is that sin does not remain idle; it grows and consumes everything that it comes in contact with. I found myself with several legal problems, separated from my wife, and serving a jail sentence. This only caused me to spiral further downward and I totally gave in to my sin. Finally my body couldn’t take it any longer and I ended up hospitalized twice in one week with heart problems. I was tired and fine with the thought of dying.

But God had other plans! My sister had been faithfully battling for my soul in prayer for over thirty-five years. She sent two RU representatives to the hospital to talk to me, and two days later I walked through the doors of the Men’s School of Discipleship. There I was met my staff and students who not only cared for my spiritual well being, but also loved me unconditionally.

After six months of intense Bible training under strong spiritual leaders and through the RU curriculum, I now have **the proper tools** to live a “productive” Christian life. Three months before I even went to RU, the Lord began to work in my wife’s life as well. God has restored my relationship with my wife, supplied me with a job, and given me a home. He restored what the world took from me and now, with the Holy Spirit’s guidance, it is my goal to start an RU chapter. May God bless all who support RU and praise my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ!

No Place to Turn

When I arrived at the RU Men's School of Discipleship in July 2008, I was a shattered man of God due to self-inflicted pain. I was coming off a 6-month run with pain pills. During that 6-month run, I suffered through three overdoses and five stays at secular detox facilities and mental health units with no success at all. After my last overdose, I was found by two of my children on the side of the road. My truck was filled with blood from a suicide attempt and I was in convulsions. The EMTs arrived and incubated me on the scene. I was rushed to the hospital and remained in a coma for four days. The doctors told my wife a number of times that I would be brain damaged for the rest of my life. It was only by the grace of God that after those four days was I brought back to life, and the doctors started to call me "Lazarus"!

With no place to turn, I applied to the RU Men's school of Discipleship, not knowing at that time that it was exactly where God wanted me to be. *It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not (Lamentations 3:22).*

Although my "start" at RU may have been rough, my "finish" of the program showed me how great our God truly is! My restored walk with Jesus has brought me to heights I never dreamed possible. The relationship with my wife and five children is being restored on a daily basis. I am actively involved in my church and the local RU chapter, and have been able to begin ministering again at a nursing home. There are not enough words to express my gratitude for the goodness and grace in our Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done in my life through the RU program.

Bigger Picture

I grew up in a Christian home where the Bible and rules were always there. I knew how to walk the walk but not how to talk the talk. I knew the Bible just for knowledge, not because I desired an intimate relationship with Christ. As I grew older and the peer pressure became stronger, I began to give in to the devil's lies. Open rebellion was very apparent in my life. First the compromises started out small, but then it became very easy to give in to a temptation without a second thought. It started with music, bad friends, wrong relationships, disrespect toward authority, and finally became "my way or the highway"!

Well, after years of living like that and always being in trouble, I finally met my match - someone I will forever be tied to whether I like it or not! Being with this person was how I was introduced to drugs and alcohol and a horrible life of nothing but sin. In November 2008 the Lord intervened in my life (although it took getting arrested). I was finally done being self centered. I knew I needed help, I knew I needed a change, and ultimately, I knew I needed the Lord.

Shortly after being arrested, I was on my way to Rockford, IL, to RUTH (RU Transitional Housing). That was the best thing I ever did - to surrender to my authority and give RU a chance! It was my first time giving my authority's advice a shot, and not telling myself that they didn't know what they were talking about. I realized that all along they only wanted nothing but the best for me.

While in the home, I learned what it was really like to have a personal relationship with the Lord. My desires, attitude, and whole reason to live began to change. I clung to Proverbs 18:10, "*The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe.*" I have learned that when things get hard I don't need to run to music,

friends, relationships... all I need is the Lord. By His grace, I have never returned to my old life!

This coming November I will have six years of victory over my addictions, and also three years of being in the Lord's service. I'm so thankful that the Lord had a different plan for me and saw a much **bigger picture** for my life. My little son and I couldn't be happier than where we are right now.

Most Important Friend

Three years ago, a failed suicide attempt landed me in jail – again. My heart was full of hate, bitterness, loneliness, defeat, and complete emptiness. I was so angry with God for things that happened throughout my childhood and used that as an excuse to make horrible decisions. My sin affected everyone in my life. I lost custody of all my children, none of my family would have anything to do with me, and I lived on the streets, supporting the very habit that stripped me of everything. *“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not”* (Jeremiah 33:3). I cried out to the Lord in anger and defeat, “If you want me to live, then You have to do it. I’m done. I can’t do this anymore.” I didn’t realize it at the time, but I was finally ready to be molded by His love. Within 2 hours of praying that prayer, I was at RU filling out an application to the Women’s School of Discipleship.

I entered the Women’s Home two days later, thinking I was there to learn how to avoid the consequences for sinful choices that I wanted to make. I didn’t want to feel dirty when I looked at people, and I wanted my kids back. *“For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be a servant of Christ”* Galatians 1:10.

The Lord has changed my heart. I now know that as long as I have Him, nothing else matters. He will be everything I ever need again. He shows me constantly that it’s His love that brings victory into my life. He’s not just a medicine I ask for when I’m broken, but the **most important Friend** I get to spend time with every day.

This is a lesson that has changed my life completely. When I put Him first, I have peace that passes understanding – regardless of the circumstances. I feel like I’m living in a fairy tale; God has blessed me beyond what I ever believed could be possible. My youngest son’s

father got saved and we were married 14 months after I entered the Women's School of Discipleship. I am once again a part of all 4 of my children's lives, and the 3 oldest have received Christ. My mother, step-father, sister, 2 cousins, 2 nieces, and a nephew and his girlfriend have all professed Christ as their Savior. I get to work for the ministry of RU and see God change lives every day. After 11 ½ years, I have my driver's license back, a home, and a car. But most importantly, I now have a relationship with the greatest, most wonderful Person who ever has or ever will live. Praise God for His mercy and love!

He Is All I Need

I am twenty-three years old, and I would like to share with you how Jesus Christ made me free from a 12-year addiction to pornography. At the age of twelve, I had my first exposure to pornography. I was exposed to it by some so-called friends. What started out as something very innocent quickly became a crippling sin that would almost destroy my life. After I was exposed to pornography, I was instantly hooked. I wanted to get my hands on it as much as possible. I knew what I was doing was wrong. My parents had raised me to know better. I was a straight “A” student all through school, and was well liked by all my peers and authorities.

I was a good kid. I never got into much trouble and never did any drugs. I used all this as an excuse to indulge in my sin. It dwelt in darkness like all sin does. I thought, “Well I’m basically a pretty good person. What’s wrong with a little indulgence of sin?” After all, it wasn’t hurting anybody. This was a lie of the devil I bought hook, line, and sinker. All the while, my parents had no idea what I was doing behind their back. My sin stayed pretty well under the radar for most of my adolescent years.

When I was young, my dad turned away from God due to some major trials in his life. When I was seventeen, my dad got right with God. I remember the change in his life and was taken aback by it. My dad was my hero, and I never realized that he had been away from God. I thought of my dad as one of the most upstanding men I knew, and I also knew that he believed in God. The first time I remember God drawing me to Himself was when my dad got his life right with God. Over the next year, God would bring many people in my life to influence me towards the things of God. My heart was being softened to see my need for the Savior.

At the age of eighteen, my dad sat down with me and gave me the

Gospel. I had heard the Gospel several times throughout my whole life, but I never really saw my need. I really didn't understand it. I thought I was a Christian because my parents were. I remember when my dad gave me the Gospel that night. I felt like I was standing in a court room with "guilty" written all over me. For the first time in my life, I saw my need for the Savior, but the one thought that kept coming to mind was, "If I accept Christ as my Savior, I can't continue to indulge in pornography." Part of me wanted to give it up, and part of me wanted to hold on to my sin. The truth was...I liked my sin. What I didn't realize was that Christ is the only One who could give me a new desire to do right.

In one ear, I had the devil saying "Put this off. You can make a decision for Christ later." And in the other ear, I heard Jesus wooing me to come to Him for salvation. There was a great battle for my soul taking place. My dad could see I was under deep conviction. He said, "If you see your need, you need to make a decision tonight, don't put it off." I was glad he said that, because it shut the devil up at least for the moment. I called out to Jesus that night and asked Him to save me. I truly believed that Jesus had lived a perfect life, died on a cross for my sin, and then rose victorious over the grave on the third day. I knew there was nothing I could do to save myself. I understood that clearly; but what I didn't understand is that Christ was the only One who could give me the power to live a righteous life. The power to overcome pornography would never come from me; it would come from the Lord.

When I accepted Christ as my Savior, I began to see pornography for what it was—sin that God hated. I felt so much shame for my sin that I didn't want to tell anyone that I had a problem with pornography. After all, I was the person "who never did anything wrong," and I had a reputation to protect. I let my pride get in the way, and I truly believe if had I sought help from my parents or pastor during the first year of being saved, pornography would never have taken hold the way it did in my life. I had a problem, but it had not completely taken control of my life. I thought I could fight this battle on my own, and that is exactly what I tried to do. I was actually able to walk away from

pornography for a couple of months, but it wasn't too long before I gave in again. This began a pattern that would occur over the next several years.

It was a least a year before I said anything to my parents about what I was struggling with. Even when I told them, I was not completely up front with them with how serious this problem had become. I still had a lot of pride. Little by little, they began to realize with horror just how big this problem had become in my life. My parents were shocked to see how long this had been a part of my life. They were very involved parents and did everything in their power to make sure I was protected from harm. What they didn't realize was that we had a pipeline of filth being streamed into our home. My parents were naïve to how easy internet pornography was to access. By the time I had come to my parents and pastor with my problem, it was already starting to spiral out of control. A lot of heartache could have been avoided had I just opened my mouth in those early days of being a Christian. The next few years would bring great pain to me and those who loved me.

Even though I received counsel from my pastor and had tighter accountability from my parents, I found very little victory in my life. I couldn't go for any real length of time without messing up. I was continually up and down. One minute, I wanted to serve God with all that was in me; the next, I was wallowing in gross sin. Every time I fell, I told myself that I wouldn't do it again, and that it would be the last time. My parents and pastor really didn't know what to do to help me. I believe they felt as helpless as I did to fight this addiction. Every time I gave into the sin, I found that it was like cords binding me tighter and tighter. I felt the grip of the addiction taking hold, and it took me farther than I wanted to go.

What started as something very innocent at the age of twelve years old was now controlling my life and leading me down a path of complete destruction. I found myself lying and being very deceitful in order to indulge and going places that I never thought I would go. I remember looking in the mirror and thinking, "I'm turning

into a monster.” To the outside world, everything looked fine. Only those who were the closest to me knew of my struggle. In fact, I experienced great success in many areas of my life during that time. I graduated from college at the top of my class. I started a career as a graphic designer, which had been my dream job for a long time. In many ways, it looked as if I had everything going for me, but I felt that my life was truly falling apart. If there wasn’t a drastic change in my life soon, I knew everything I had ever worked for would be lost.

I was a functioning addict in every sense of the word, but I was ceasing to function. Slowly, but surely, every area of my life began to be affected. I felt like I was on a roller coaster that would not stop, up and down, up and down. I became so discouraged, wondering if I would ever be free from this addiction. What was sad is that I didn’t have anybody really standing up to give me much hope. In fact, I was told by good, well-meaning people that I might not ever get victory in my life, that the Christian life was nothing more than a struggle this side of heaven. It was just something I would have to deal with; and eventually, with time, things would get better. I had hard time accepting that. That wasn’t what I found when I read the Bible, but after about the millionth time of falling, I began to believe the lie that this was just the way it was going to be. I was completely and utterly defeated. I remember one day thinking heaven would be so much better than the hell I was going through here on earth. I had no doubts of my salvation, but I was tired of living defeated. I also didn’t feel I deserved to live. I felt that I was doing great harm to the cause of Christ with the way my life was going.

I chose to overdose on over-the-counter medication one day; but after doing so, I realized I didn’t want to die. I told my mom I had overdosed, and she immediately gave me something to induce vomiting so I could get most of the medication out of my system. We did all of this on the way to the emergency room where I found out my mom’s quick action had saved my life. I had indeed taken a lethal amount of medication. By God’s mercy, my life had been spared. One would think that experience alone would have been enough to turn me around. Not even two weeks later, I fell hard, and this time it went

to a whole new level. This would be the fall that would cause me to come to the end of myself.

Four months before all of this, my church started a RU program. I saw hope for the first time. RU was the first place that I saw real victory through Christ. I got involved in going to the Friday night classes and began learning what a real walk with Jesus Christ is like. I was no stranger to reading my Bible; in fact, I was quite disciplined in reading my Bible. I read it every day, even on the days I fell. I thought if I read my Bible more and did more for God that surely He would give me favor, and I would be able to overcome my addiction. I was very faithful to church, outreach, and any activity the church may be having. I was told one of the best ways to overcome sin was to just get plugged into church and work hard for God. That worked on the days when I had something to do for the church, but on the days I wasn't in church, I would mess up. I was becoming church dependent. Really, I was trying to depend on my efforts. I thought all of my service was my walk with God. Through RU, I had begun to see what a real walk with Christ could be like; but after my last fall, I knew in my heart God was leading me to make some big changes in my life.

Through my local chapter, I found out that RU had a men's home in Rockford, Illinois. God opened the doors for me to go to the men's home. When I came to Rockford, I was completely broken. I no longer trusted in myself. I became completely open to whatever God wanted to do in my life. Very quickly, God began to open my eyes to the fact that I had been trusting in myself for victory instead of Him. I had no problem accepting the fact that Christ did all the work for salvation, but I somehow thought that He expected me to be the one working at changing my life. The Lord opened my eyes to the fact that the same way I got saved is the same way I am supposed to live the Christian life—with complete dependence on Jesus Christ. This was a major revelation for me that completely changed my life. I began to find that as I developed a dependency on Christ; and as God became real to me through His Word, I no longer had an extreme desire to indulge in pornography. God was making me free. I had never felt such freedom in my life.

During this time, God also revealed to me the importance of obeying what He has shown me to be His will. Lack of surrender in the life of a Christian will always lead to failure and powerlessness over sin. God called me to preach when I was in college, and I didn't surrender. When I came to the men's home, I finally surrendered to the call God had on my life. When I became open to allowing Jesus to be the Lord of my life, I found what once had seemed impossible to attain, now almost became effortless in many ways. This was Christ doing the work in me, rather than me trying to make it happen myself. The life of Christ in me became a reality for me. I began to focus on yielding to the internal persuasion of the Holy Spirit. God prepares me for my day in the morning, prompting me with verses. As I meditate on the verses throughout the day, the Holy Spirit begins to lead me and guide me with the Word. I have begun a true walk with God, and everything is changing.

I found out pornography may have been the most glaring sin in my life, but I also had many other areas in my life in which I was defeated. Worry was a great stronghold for me, and God has begun to give me victory in this area as well. The good news is not just "Jesus saves from hell," but it's also that he saves from sin—all sin. Liberty that comes from walking in obedience to God's Spirit is absolutely amazing. Before I came to Rockford, God gave me a verse that showed me He was going to do a big work in my life. Ephesians 3:20, *"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."* I began to get to know that Power. His name is Jesus Christ, and He lives His life in me. Christ has done exceeding abundantly above all I could ask or think. When I got my eyes off self and on my Savior, I realized **He is all I need** to live free in a sin-infested world.

Small Part of a Big Plan

Rev 12:11 states, *“and they overcame him by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony.”* When I was in my addiction, I was not concerned with what anybody thought or if anybody was watching. I was mean and evil, living in sin and serving the only one who is worse than I am – Satan. I was on a continual quest to satisfy an insatiable heroin addiction. I was hurting my loved ones to the point that I would look at them as they slept and cry because of the pain I was causing them. What a miserable life to endure.

I was praying for God to help me and on June 29th, 2012 he showed me mercy yet again. I was arrested. I know it must seem rather strange to be grateful for going to jail, but that is where the healing began. The amazing hand of God was in control. Where I went, it normally takes an average of 2 months to get into the RU Institutional program, but for me it only took 5 days. In no way do I feel that the program saved me, but it was a **small part of a big plan.**

The RU leaders shared the gospel with me and led me to Christ. In July of 2012 I surrendered my selfish desires and decided that I would no longer live separated from God. I found hope by Jesus taking first place in my life. My disobedience can no longer be an option. Thank you, Jesus. Glory to God. Thank you for calling me out of the darkness.

From Jail to RU

My upbringing was simple and normal, growing up in a little country town in Florida. My parents are Christians and we went to church every time the doors were opened. I knew who God was at an early age and I remember asking Jesus into my heart when I was about 8 or 9 years old. Looking back on my salvation, I know now that I didn't completely understand why I needed it. Growing up in a Christian home was pretty simple as long as I followed all the rules. But I never really applied any of the rules or teachings to my life, and therefore a long hard road was waiting for me when I became an adult.

My addiction started after years of struggling with major back pain. By the time I was 21, I had already had two major back surgeries which both failed and only left me addicted to pain pills. After trying for years to cover up my addiction to the medication, I was introduced to cocaine and that became my drug of choice. Cocaine took me down a path where I never thought I would go. I did things that I thought I would never do. I became a person that I never intended to be...but that is what drugs do. I lost all hope of ever being anything more than a drug addict.

My family tried for many years to help me. I was in and out of jail and treatment facilities numerous times. Every time someone tried to help me, I took advantage of them, hurt them, and just kept doing things to fuel my habit. There was no end in sight. I tried everything I could to get off the drugs, but the most I was able to accomplish was a few weeks of "clean time", masked by medications to help with my back pain. Doctors kept telling me that I would be in pain for the rest of my life and as a result, I was able to get as much medication as possible for whatever I complained about. The road became darker and darker. The longer I took the medication, the more I kept falling

into the cocaine hole that eventually tried to consume me.

I cried out to God on many occasions, “Why, Lord, are You not helping me overcome this? Why are You not caring for me?” I would go to the altar after each church service and beg God for help. I kept struggling with my salvation, questioning if I was really saved because I did not have the inward spirit dwelling within me. If I did, I had never felt it or listened to it. After months of going through this routine every Sunday at church, a family friend finally asked me if I was truly saved. When he asked me that question, the spirit of the Lord became real. I knew I was not saved and so, on October 19th, 2008, I accepted Jesus into my heart and He became my Lord and Savior!

Shortly after this, the Lord allowed me to hit rock bottom. Once again I found myself in a jail cell, but this time I knew I had to make some changes in my life. I had tried so many places and had no clue what to do. I received a visit from a pastor who knew about RU and told me what an amazing place it was. But when this Florida girl found out it was in Rockford, IL, she knew she wasn't about to make it there! Then I got another visit from someone that I didn't know and they also told me of the same place, RU. The guard asked me if I knew about RU because that last visit wasn't for me; it was for another girl who had been released that morning. At that point I knew I needed to take a good hard look at this place called RU.

Within 24 hours of being accepted into the Women's School of Discipleship, I went **from jail to the RU** program in Rockford, IL! This ministry not only gave me the tools to be successful in my recovery, but also taught me how to enjoy life victoriously. When I finally realized that Jesus loved me so much, that's when my life began to change. I now live by the principles that RU taught me and am happy to say that I am now living in victory. My favorite principle is Principle #6: “Those who do not love the Lord will not help you serve the Lord.” I am so blessed to be a part of this ministry and be around people that Love the Lord and want to serve him just like me. Praise the Lord for HIS goodness!!!!

God's Word is My Medicine

I grew up in a Christian home. After being diagnosed with leukemia in 1990 I made a profession of faith and asked Jesus to come into my heart. My years of going through chemo began a life filled with depression and anxiety. When I was a senior in high school my parents divorced, and I began a rebellious lifestyle. During that time, I realized I was a sinner deserving hell and that I needed God in my life. I settled the security of my salvation and accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior. I thank the Lord for his mercy and grace because I know I have an eternal home in heaven when I die.

I met my husband and we got married and started a family. On October 27, 2007 our first born son went home to be with the Lord. I had no hope of ever being happy again. I always searched for anything just to be happy. I looked to people, my husband, materialistic things, adventure, doctors, medicine, alcohol, and anything else I could think of to make me happy, but it was only temporary and I was right back into my depression. We began going to church regularly and got involved in ministries at our church, but I still battled with my anxiety and depression. In December of 2012 we moved away from our home church and church family. By the month of April I had gotten so deep into my depression that I tried to end my life, but by God's mercy and grace I am still here to be a living testimony of what God has brought me from.

The Lord brought me to the RU Women's School of Discipleship where I learned how to have a personal, intimate relationship with Him. I no longer feel the need to search for ways or things to cure me of my depression and anxiety. My cure is the Lord and **God's Word is my medicine!** I need His Word every morning before starting my day.

The Lord used a dear friend of mine to show me this verse: John 14:27, "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the*

world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” The Lord has freed me from constant worry and fear. He has restored my joy that is not just a temporary happiness, but is a true joy that can only come from Him. I no longer have to live in worry and fear of what tomorrow may bring or have everything planned out in my life, for the Lord is my strength. He is my joy and my peace. With Christ living through me, I know He is the one doing the planning and He is the one guiding me through each step.

I'm a Child of the King

For many years, I had what the world would call, “The Perfect Family.” My husband and I both trusted Christ as our Savior when we were children. We had a large, beautiful home and were quite successful.

In spite of all that I had accomplished on my own, I was absolutely miserable. On the outside, everything looked great! But on the inside, I was dead. Things and people were no longer making me happy. I used prescribed pain medications to dull the pain and agony that dwelt in my heart (which only enhanced my performance, making me look better with my more “stable” demeanor).

My church started an RU chapter that I faithfully attended for two years, but I still wasn't getting it. I finally agreed to enter RU's “in-patient,” six to eight month women's discipleship program. I immediately began to experience freedom. I was at a place where people loved me, just as I was, sin and all.

The devil however, had plans for me...he didn't like the strength that I was finding in God. Four months later, through the rebellion not yet purged out of my heart, I yielded to temptations and fell hard. However, God, through His great love, didn't quit on me. He went after me like that lost sheep that went astray. He opened my eyes, and I truly repented.

Unfortunately, it was too late. I lost everything, including my family. God made it clear after almost five months of brokenness that He wanted me back at RU. I quickly obeyed...no turning back.

God has done nothing but bless and develop me “*in Christ*” ever since. Not only has He filled my gaping hole; but He has begun, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to heal my broken heart and

life. He continuously teaches me that there is not one person that will love me, sin and all, the way God does. Yet, I can love others the way Christ loves me, which I am learning is more rewarding than being loved.

One of the most important things He has taught me since I have graduated is to not give place to the devil through continued condemnation and guilt for the things I've done. God has forgiven me, and that settles it. He no longer sees me how I used to be. I praise the Lord for this program's leadership, chapels, Bible college classes, Sunday school, and Friday night RU classes. But more than that, I praise the Lord for a church and a pastor that displays such Christ-like love to accept "rejects" like me. For now I know that to accept that I am a reject is a lie straight from the pit of hell. **I'm a child of the King.** He's got everything under control!

All For Him

My mom and dad divorced when I was 6 years old. My dad reenlisted in the Navy; and my mom, who understood little English, was left to raise two children by herself. We were fortunate to move next door to a married Christian couple who had a heart for us and took us to church. This was a happy time in our lives. But, when the pastor left, so did we. I believe my heart was tender due to the time I had spent in that church. I do not think I was saved, but I wanted to do right.

Like most teenagers, my friends became my first priority. I began to dabble with sin here and there. I was insecure and began focusing on myself and my own feelings, with a total disregard for others. When I was sixteen, my dad moved back into our lives permanently. He had remarried and was now going to church. In 1998, while attending church with my dad, I trusted Christ as my Savior and was baptized. Nevertheless, I still felt unsure.

As time passed, friends became more important than going to church, my dad and I stopped talking, and I began to do whatever I wanted with no accountability. My sin started to catch up with me. Social drinking led to experimenting with drugs and an immoral lifestyle. I found myself doing things I would never do, and I began to reap all the wrong I had sown. I would never be innocent again, and nothing could change that. I got pregnant and set out to have an abortion. At seven weeks along, all I could think about was this baby growing inside of me. The week of the abortion, I had many sleepless nights. My mom encouraged me the night before the abortion appointment to have my baby, and she promised to help me. I chose to keep my baby.

Then, by the grace of God, I did not struggle with an outward addiction. However, I believe God brought my daughter into my

life to show me I needed Him. He brought me low so He could help me up. In January 200 I became convinced of the assurance of my salvation! Since then, the Lord has restored my relationship with my dad. My daughter and I moved in with him. I had to learn to submit to his authority at the age of twenty-two. This was not easy. I tried to run away a few times, but the Holy Spirit always brought me back. You cannot run from God.

My dad became RU director at our church, and that is when I started to get involved. God began to work in my heart so I could focus on others. I was happy and decided to surrender my life to Him.

I had recently moved out of my dad's house and into my own place. I thought I would get closer to the Lord as I trusted him with my financial needs and everything else. But, instead, the everyday pressures of life made me more frustrated. I slowly began to skip church, and I was reading my Bible less and less. Although I was telling others about Christ where I worked and thought I was doing good, I did not realize I was doing it in my own power. God had to show me, once again, that I was not in control.

I joined my dad at a conference where Brother Curington was speaking. Hearing the term "self-righteous" as he spoke, I realized that described me. A week later, I was in the Women's School of Discipleship in Rockford, Illinois.

I am thankful for what the Lord has done in my life through the ministry of RU. Some days seem long and hard, but always He is with me! I do not want to do the work in my life any longer; I want God to do His work through me as He shows me new things. It's **all for Him!**

The Way of Freedom

I was first introduced to drugs and alcohol around the age of 11. In spite of my Christian upbringing and godly home environment, I was lured into an addictive lifestyle as a young teenager. While at church one evening, a friend of mine offered me cigarettes for the first time. He said, "If you try these you will get a buzz." I took the cigarettes home that night and smoked them in the backyard of the Oregon home I grew up in. Soon after my exposure to tobacco, I was offered marijuana, and soon after that, alcohol. I was infatuated with the party lifestyle and would often skip school to go use drugs and get drunk. I was expelled from Christian school in eighth grade for having drugs and alcohol on campus, and when I entered public high school as a freshman, my life quickly began spinning out of control.

My youth pastor invited me to attend a youth conference in California with the youth group when I was 15. It was at that conference where I became convicted that I was a sinner and put my trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. My life changed dramatically and God gave me victory over the drugs, alcohol, bad friends, and many other struggles I was having. About a year later, He called me to preach. I finished high school and went off to a Christian college to study for the ministry.

Everything was going great until my senior year of college when I found out I had kidney stones. I went to the doctor for tests and he prescribed Vicodin and a muscle relaxer to take for 30 days. I didn't realize then that taking the medication was a step in the wrong direction, eventually leading me back to an addiction to drugs and alcohol.

After finishing college in May 2006, I went on staff at a church in my hometown. One evening, feeling overworked and stressed out, I made a foolish decision. I went to a nearby gas station and purchased two

24 ounce cans of beer, took them back to my apartment, and drank them. I justified it by saying, “Just one time, and that will be all.” But it wasn’t just one time. Sin never stays small, and eventually I bought two more... then two more... then three more. Within weeks, I was not only addicted to alcohol, but also to marijuana, cocaine, and other drugs.

I was arrested twice in 21 days for driving under the influence. Not long after that, I landed in jail with a felony charge for possession of cocaine. For the first time in months I cried out to God for help, asking him to take away my addiction. My probation officer recommended a secular rehab program which lasted 35 days and cost \$7,700. A good friend of mine called me while I was there and told me about RU. He explained the six-month residential program in Rockford IL, but I said no, thinking I would be clean after completing the secular rehab program I was in.

Just 48 hours after graduating from that rehab I fell back into my addiction, and for three months went deeper and deeper. Finally on Christmas Day of 2009, my sister approached me about attending the Men’s School of Discipleship in Rockford, IL, and I surrendered. God brought me here two weeks later and changed my life! Within days I discovered that what I needed was not just sobriety, I needed victory. I also learned that victory and freedom are found in Jesus Christ alone. He has taken away all my cravings, and replaced my desire for the party lifestyle with a desire to serve Him with my life. He has restored many relationships, my driver’s license, my call to preach, and so many other things. I am truly grateful for the way God used the RU program to point me in **the way of freedom!**

A Miraculous Transforming Work

I was raised in a godly Christian home as a pastor's son, and I accepted Jesus as my Savior at the age of 12. My life of sin started at a very young age with pornography and an extremely rebellious attitude. I felt that the boundaries my parents placed over me were restrictive and holding me back from experiencing true freedom and enjoyment in life. So at the age of 16 I started listening to wrong music, which led me to hanging out with unsaved friends. A year later I began experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

Over the course of the next four years, I lived a life of lies, selfishness, hatred, and hypocrisy toward my parents and everyone around me. I had forsaken God, and lived every day trying to fill that void in my heart with possessions and worldly lusts, all the while just masking my pain and disappointment with drugs.

Regardless of all the pain and heartache I put them through, my parents were so merciful and longsuffering toward me, and they never stopped praying because they believed that God would work a miracle in my life. Their prayers were answered in December of 2012 when I tried a new drug and had a severe allergic reaction to it which sent me to the hospital and nearly took my life. But God spared me for a specific purpose, and it was there lying in that hospital bed with my parents on either side of me that I surrendered to coming to the RU Men's School of Discipleship.

After about a month in the home, God really worked in my heart. In prayer one day I was broken of my selfish will and completely surrendered my life to Christ. From that day on, the Lord has done a **miraculous transforming work** in my life!

Through the teaching and my own study of God's Word, I have learned the truth about myself and the bondage to sin that I was in. But more importantly than that, I learned the glorious truth that true freedom and happiness lies in the very thing I had spent my whole life rejecting - a personal love relationship with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When I realized the depth of Christ's love for me, it changed my life forever, and began my life's pursuit of closeness with my Creator.

The Lord has truly made me new. He has given me a desire to live an honest, upright, crucified Christian life. He has taken every sin that I thought would bring me satisfaction, and replaced them with Jesus the Living Water and the Bread of Life, who brings present and eternal satisfaction! The love of Jesus has transformed me, and it is only His infinite love that can overcome the pull of this world.

Change of Heart

I am 27 years old. I did not grow up in a Christian home nor attend church. I was raised in a worldly environment. I'd always felt a sense of emptiness in my heart. My desire to fill this emptiness soon became an addiction to alcohol, heroin, and many other sinful habits. These addictions continued uncontrollably, even after my daughter was born, then led me to search out help from many different secular programs. I would have a short amount of sobriety but I never felt true happiness and comfort.

It wasn't until May of 2011 when I came to RU that I felt hopeful for the first time in my life. Psalm 73:26, *"My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."*

There I received Christ as my personal Savior and began having victory over my addictions. Although the Lord gave me victory and started changing my life, I did not give everything over to Him. I held on to everything about my worldly life except for the drugs.

Around October 2012 my mom became sick, but instead of turning to God and my church family for help, I turned to drugs and old friends. I soon lost sight of the Lord and became enticed by worldly sins. My mom passed away two months later and I fell deep into my addictions. I grew angry at God and wanted no part of Him anymore. This led me to getting arrested, becoming homeless, and despairing of life.

In God's grace and mercy, He saved me from those worldly sins. I came into the Women's Discipleship Home in April 2013 and since then God has given me victory over drugs and alcohol. My relationship with the Lord is better than it has ever been. He has restored my family and given me peace about my mom's death. He's allowed me to be the mom He intended me to be, and **changed my heart** to want to serve the Him with my life and raise my daughter to do so as well. Philippians 1:6, *"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."*

“He is Really Real!”

SHORT TESTIMONIES FROM THE DISCIPLESHIP HOMES

My experience in Rockford has changed my life. I praise God for His grace and forgiveness. He has delivered me from my bitterness and given me peace.

God has used RU as tool to develop my relationship with Christ. Only by the grace of God can I now claim victory by the blood of Jesus Christ. God has been merciful to me...to God be the glory!

God called many times...finally I listened! Humbly I came, I listened, I prayed, I read my Bible, and I surrendered. I know not what God’s plans are for me, but... “Here am I, I will go.”

What I have learned through RU is that my feelings are just as valid as others; and that I now, with the power of God, can stop running and face all adversity using the tools of the fruit of the Spirit. I have a Foundation I’ve never had and I am thankful for my time at the Women’s School of Discipleship.

I feel so happy to have had the chance to be a part of the RU Men’s School of Discipleship. I have been able to walk closer to God with the time that I have spent here.

I praise the Lord for placing me in the Men’s School of Discipleship. God has shown me that full reliance and faith in Him is the only way. Through His truth and mercy, I now realize my own self-medication is never the answer. The only answer is through Jesus Christ alone. We all need to die to ourselves, take up our cross, and allow Him to live in us and shine through us to the lost and dying world. (James 1:2-4)

I came into the doors of the RU Men's School of Discipleship a complete tragic mess, with a past I thought was unfixable. Through this program, I learned to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. With Him in my heart, things in my life are slowly getting fixed, as well as my spiritual talk and walk. Praise the Lord!!!

I praise God for my time here at RU! I have learned to have a personal walk with Jesus Christ that is far greater than I could have ever thought. 1 Cor. 15:57-58 is one of the many verses I have applied to my life so that I can have victory over my addiction. May my life be an example of the change He has made as He continues to mold me into the image of Christ.

RU has turned me from an arrogant, selfish, angry drug addict into a loving, caring, joyful servant of the Lord! By learning to walk with Him through the curriculum and fellowship found in this ministry, I am able to look in the mirror. Praise God for the vision my leadership had when they formed this ministry because without them and this ministry, I would be dead or in prison. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

I look where I was six months ago and see what God has done in my life. I thank God I came to RU or I would have never gotten what God has wanted me to have for a long time...Jesus Christ! Amen!

During the time that I have been in the RU Men's School of Discipleship, something miraculously awesome has happened! I have found out that **God is really real!** In my daily devo's, I humbly seek Him and He shows up. God walks with me and He talks with me. Praise God I have fallen in love with Jesus. (Philippians 1:20)

I came to the RU Men's School of Discipleship full of pride, anger, suspicion, and fear. I wanted to run but I couldn't. In the Jewish culture, to lie at a person's feet is a display of humility,

a request for someone to administer care. Here at the Men's Home, my spirit has been "cared for". I am humble, joyful, and trusting with strength and courage. Now I can be still, surrender all, and lay at my Father's feet.

While at RU, I learned that rising early in the morning to meet with the Lord makes all the difference. The closer I get to Him, the more He reveals to me. Peace and joy have returned to me and I look forward to serving the Lord in the capacity He chooses. I am grateful that God has given me this opportunity and look forward to rebuilding relationships that I almost ruined.

When I arrived at the RU Men's School of Discipleship I knew about God; but now I have a personal relationship with Him. I've learned to submit and wait on Him. He brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a Rock.

When I entered the door of the Men's School of Discipleship, I was hopeless and addicted. I had no peace in my life and was enslaved to sin. Over the last six months I have developed a relationship with my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. RU has changed my life and I am so thankful for what Christ has done. Before I came to the RU Women's School of Discipleship, I was always looking for some way to be happy. I finally found peace and joy through my daily personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I have been chosen and called according to God's purpose. I am no longer afraid to give my life over for God's will. (Isaiah 41:10)

I am so grateful to God for allowing me to be a part of this incredible program. Since coming to RU, I have learned to truly trust in the Lord and seek His strength during times of adversity. Through developing a personal relationship with Jesus I have been blessed with joy and peace like never before. (Nahum 1:7)

When I first came to RU, I did not have a walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. I spent most of my adult life living in my addiction. I now have a close walk with the Lord Jesus Christ, who gives me power over my addiction.

Jesus saves! I know from experience that not only does He save, but He also convicts and converts. He was, is, and forever will be saving souls and changing lives. Thanks for allowing me to come to RU and to find my life for God's will. John 14:6

My strongholds of crack cocaine and pornography were my "gods". Now delivered from these false gods and/or evil spirits, I am fully empowered with a living faith in He who is my Friend, Savior, and Lord - Jesus Christ!

I am so eternally grateful for all the changes internally that the Lord has made in my life. I am forever changed. I am so grateful for the opportunity to come to God's "green house," where I could grow in a controlled environment. I give my heartfelt thanks to all those who supported me. I look forward to the dedication of my life unto the Lord, along with my children.



CHAPTER 4
RU INSIDE (RIP)
Testimonies

Though in Jail, I Have Freedom

Prior to incarceration I believed there was a God, but I didn't think He cared about me. This misconception was partly because my dad told me that God would punish the son for the sins of his father, and partly because my life was so messed up. Nothing had gone right for the first 34 years of my life. Two weeks after coming to jail, someone in my cell asked me to go to an RU meeting with him. He told me that God had told him to ask me. I took that as a sign and went where I heard very godly men preaching a powerful message. I got saved that night and started going to church every opportunity I had. I learned about the story of Paul and that God loves me regardless what my dad or I have done.

I have turned my life over to God and I try my best every single day to please Him and do His will. The RU class and books have taught me a lot about what it means to be a Christian. I am learning what true love is, about meekness and longsuffering, and how to deal with all kinds of people, whether or not they are Christians. I have also learned that the love of God can keep me from falling prey to the sinful activities that got me into trouble in the first place. God has given me peace in my soul, and even **though I am in jail, I have a freedom** that I have never experienced before.

Ever since I have been living for God, He has been answering so many prayers and showing me His goodness and care. I prayed to get moved to a better cell and I was put in the honor pod. Then I prayed to be made a trustee and was granted the position. God has given me everything I have prayed for so far. I have no choice but to praise Him. I am very thankful for His many blessings, and for the RU class and the men of God who teach it. With all I have learned in this class, I now have the tools to fight against sin and the devil. I also know that God will keep blessing me and, after all of this is over, I will have

an even better testimony to share with others. Maybe I can even bring others to God. Thank you very much for RU and your time and your love.

I Read This Book and Asked God to Save Me

I have been in prison for years now. Last week, they brought me back to *(name)* County jail in *(city)*, *(state)* for some eleven year old charges. I'm getting ready to be released from federal prison, and I know these old charges will be taken care of with time served. They will transport me back to federal prison, do my paperwork, and release me.

I wondered why they would come and get me for some real minor charges that are eleven years old when I've already been in federal prison for years. Now I know why. It's God's plan. **I read this book from RU and asked God to save me.** As I read on, it asked me to write and let you know, so here I am. I could stop here, and maybe I should, but I'm going to keep writing because I want to share more.

I always knew there was a God, and over the years, I have really gone through things because of my drug addiction. I ended up going to federal prison on gun and drug charges. That is no longer important to me. At this point, I want to serve God. Something inside of me keeps telling me that I went through the things I did so I could learn to serve God and share my experiences with others.

There is so much I want to learn and share, and I know that is God's plan for me because I should have been dead 100 times over. But God has a plan for me, and I know this. I pray He shows me the way, and I know He will. I no longer want to suffer the life of drugs, guns, prison, and women of bad nature. Living a life for God is new to me, but it is what I want. I'm not sure why I am writing all of this, but something inside of me said to write it, so here I am.

If you will, please pray for me and ask God to show me His will and work with me so I can serve Him. Where I'm going to live or work, I don't know. I do know that God will show me if I just pray and keep my faith strong. I still have a whole life ahead of me, and I want it to be serving God and doing His work.

My Life Began Changing

Love, joy, peace, hope... Who and why wouldn't anyone want to experience all of these, as well as many more, on a daily basis? At one time, I denied myself all of these blessings. I grew up in a loving, Christian home up until I was 15 years old. Then my family life started falling apart. I turned to my friends and the outside world for comfort. Before long, I was on my own and associating with people who used drugs. I lived a very unhealthy life for over 20 years, trying from time to time to break away from drugs, yet never feeling whole.

In the back of my mind I always knew God was the answer, but for a reason I cannot understand, I refused to go to Him. I tried many ways to overcome my addiction and ungodly ways of life but could not get the hole in my heart and soul filled no matter what I tried. It is so true that our trials and may be blessings in disguise. My experience of incarceration has definitely been my blessing! It has brought me to RU. I must admit, my first confrontation again with God was that of anger for all I felt He had allowed in my life. Needless to say, I knew better and it was all of my doing. Once I began to recognize this and surrender myself to God, **my life began changing**. I no longer feel desperate, but hopeful; no longer angry, but loving; no longer questioning, but trusting.

God, Unlike Man, is Merciful

At the age of 47, I find myself back in trouble again. I was doing great. I was working 40-60 hours per week. I was bearing the load of my family. I was in and out of the hospital and still making it back to work. I felt I had to do whatever was necessary to feed my family. Now I am once again incarcerated, facing too much time. As you can see, I depended on myself and not God!! I started the RU program to study the Bible. The realization was spontaneous that I have a problem. If I didn't, I wouldn't be here. I realize that when you don't keep God in your life, that gives the devil permission to manipulate you and strengthen your iniquities. I do realize there's a price to pay! Violating the laws of our country and even worse, God's law! I'm so happy that **God, unlike man, is merciful!** The RU program is magnificent, and I am so happy to be a part of it.

Behind Bars, But Free!

I grew up around alcohol. My dad was an alcoholic and my mother said he was very abusive, but I don't remember much of my childhood; probably because my mind chooses to block it out. My parents divorced when I was 9 years old and my mom, younger sister, and I moved to another city. She never drank when she was with my father, but started drinking once they separated. One day, she invited some men over. She passed out from drinking too much and the men tried to touch me and my sister. I told my dad about it and he came to pick us up the very next day. From that point on, my dad quit drinking and tried hard to raise us to the best of his abilities. He worked, cooked, cleaned, and made sure we were fed, clothed, and safe from harm.

I started drinking when I was 11 years old and was always in trouble. I was sent to an institution for kids at the age of 14 for a 2-year span because I was constantly in jail for consuming alcohol as a minor. After jail, I was put into a foster home for a while until I turned 18. I returned to my hometown and fell back into drinking, smoking marijuana, and cigarettes. The patterns of my destructive lifestyle only lead to spending more time in and out of jail.

I will be 42 this summer and am back in jail, this time for hurting my 12 year old daughter while I was blacked out from drinking. This incident made me feel devastated, ashamed, and guilty. I felt like my life was over. I was transferred to another jail, which is where I was introduced to the RU ministry. I first started attending as a means to get out of my cell, but then began listening to what our leader had to say and I reading the material she gave me. It was as if God was speaking right to me. Suddenly it all made sense and I decided to give my heart to Jesus.

Nothing has worked for me before. I've tried going to treatment

facilities, AA meetings, and even managed to stay sober for a year in my own power, but I was miserable, unhappy, and not very fun to be around.

I feel so blessed and I know that I need Jesus in my life. He has been teaching me every day and filling my heart with His love. Even though **I'm behind bars, I finally feel free!** It's hard to explain, I was so down and out when I went to jail, but now I see that it was all a part of God's plan for me. I'm using the time that I'm in jail to get to know God. I am so excited to tell people about Him and how great He is!

A New-Found Hope

I was brought up in a Christian home with my dad, 4 brothers, and 2 sisters. My mother passed away in a car accident when I was 17. I've been lost ever since I was little. When my dad died, I started drinking off and on. Since the drinking started, every boyfriend I have ever had I met at a bar. When I was 22, I had my "real" boyfriend who was a heavy drinker; with his drinking came physical abuse. As the years went by, I turned to drinking as a means of entertainment and to numb the pain of abuse. I was so severely beaten in 2009 that I almost lost my life; I began to drink even more.

I started helping a disabled friend and in exchange, he offered to pay for my living expenses. With this relationship came a new kind of abuse: emotional abuse. If he felt I wasn't spending enough time with him or giving him the attention he desired, he wouldn't pay my bills. I would seclude myself and drink until I felt "healed" enough to return to work. A vicious cycle of working and drinking consumed my life.

Later on, I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and even suffered multiple head injuries from multiple men. Within the last 2 years I have suffered more than I have in my entire life combined. Leading up to the day I was arrested, I found myself homeless and unable to provide for my own basic needs; I was also involved in two destructive relationships between the disabled man I was caring for and my alcoholic boyfriend at the time.

I prayed and prayed for God to change my situation and improve my life. Now I can see that the Lord brought me to jail to protect me from further abuse, to help me get sober, and to lead me to the ministry of RU. I first attended RU on July 11th and I'm so grateful for the ministry! I have been sober for 4 months now; the longest

I have been sober since I was 17. I hope and pray that God keeps giving me wisdom, strength, and knowledge every day so that once I leave here, I am able to continue my life in sobriety. I now desire to keep my life and my heart clean; I have **a new-found hope** for my life. I look forward to Friday nights and being able to help others like myself who have struggled with addictions. I want them to know that they are loved by God and that He doesn't want them to suffer. I thank God for bringing RU into my life because I don't feel hopeless, lost, and alone anymore.

It's His Strength

Before coming to jail, I was doing very badly. I got hooked on drugs and went from smoking meth to shooting it up. I was constantly gone and neglected my family. I put my habit before everyone and everything. I've been struggling with my addiction for about seven years. It's caused me to lose just about everything. I've been through some very rough times. My whole family wanted nothing to do with me for a while. For about a year I was homeless and thought my life was over. I was so depressed that I popped a bunch of pills trying to O.D. My life was a downward spiral that I thought would never end.

In January 2013, I was arrested and taken into custody. I let my bad choices get me in big trouble. I was sentenced to a term of eight years. From the beginning, it was a major reality check. I lost contact with my girlfriend and children because they were tired of my lifestyle and bad choices. I started praying every night for God to please help me get my family back. A short time later, I reached my girlfriend and patched things up. My mom writes me every week, and my dad visits me weekly as well. I knew God had a plan for me.

A few months later, I was given the opportunity to attend a Bible study program offered by a pastor of a Baptist church. That's where I found out about the RU program. From the moment I walked in, I was hooked. The pastor is so inspirational and motivating. He teaches us so much using the RU program.

On July 18, 2013, my life was changed forever. I was led in the sinner's prayer and was saved. It was the beginning of a great change in me. I've been working through the booklets provided and have already earned two certificates for completing twelve, and then eighteen challenges. It's not only given me a new outlook, but also a second chance to regain control of my life.

Now, with my family supporting me, I know I'm ready to be the man God intended for me to be. Of all the verses I've been reading in the Bible, the one I've like the most so far has to be Philippians 4:13, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" It's **His strength** that has carried me through these tough times. Thanks for starting such a great program that helps people change their lives. It definitely helped to change mine. Thank you, and God bless!

Tears of Joy

I sit behind these prison walls, not because I was addicted to drugs or alcohol, but because I was addicted to anything to do with sex. Today I opened a letter from a man who does a Bible study with me. Inside was a testimony tract from RU. After reading it, the thought hit me that this young lady went through pure torture before she realized her life was out of control. When all else failed in her life, she got to know God and was saved in the body of Christ. That sounds like someone else I know... me.

A lifestyle of lust, unfaithfulness, and using women as objects of my sinful passions brought me to rock bottom. I thought of the hundreds of girlfriends, 3 marriages, my dear wife and little daughter, and all the others I have hurt. On February 14, I woke up and told myself that I had to change. I love my wife and don't want to lose her. Our family seemed happy, yet I was miserable because of all my sin.

Three days later, I was arrested and charged with 40 counts of rape, GSI, kidnapping, and sexual assault. I found myself in jail, torn apart, my world upside down, and my family destroyed.

It was there that I again heard about God and realized that I didn't really know Him. I began attending an RU program with a desire to learn, but I was too scared to let anyone into my life, not knowing that God already knew everything about me. In August I finally gave up. "God, you are my Shepherd," I prayed, "I am your sheep. Do with me as You will; I give up. I realize my ways aren't Your ways, and that my way will never win against You. I am a sinner and have been for many years; as a matter of fact, all of them. I was born a sinner, but I do believe that Your Son Jesus Christ died on that cross of Calvary for me. He took the place of all my sins. I also believe that He was and is a true man, that no one could keep Him down, and that on the third

day He rose up to meet You in heaven. So here I am, the most sinful man in the world. I ask humbly for Your forgiveness of my sins. The devil baited me for years and I always bit the worm, but God, I want You to reel me in. Your frying pan ain't as hot as the devil's. Take me as I am, change my heart, my mind, my soul. Lead me down Your path. The only way I can win is through You. Help me, Lord, just as you have helped many others.”

In September, I received a letter from the court stating that they were going to charge me with abusing my daughter. Heartbroken, shocked, and crying my eyes out, I placed my trust in Jesus saying, “Let Your will be done. I don't have the strength to fight any more.” I went to court with the Lord on my side as I trusted him. In April I received a letter that the case with my daughter had been dismissed without prejudice. I was so happy that **tears of joy** fell from my eyes. And who was the first person I thanked? That's right, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

There have been many ups and downs since then, and my case and future are still being decided. I am placing my trust in Jesus and asking Him to help me. I don't have the strength to go through this on my own but He is helping me learn to wait patiently for His will.

The Spirit of God has Taken Over

Since I began your program, God has really been blessing me. My spiritual growth has been amazing, not only in my life, but God has been blessing others also. I am still in the R.I.P. program. But not only that, God has blessed me to play a very important role with these inmates. I live in an 18 man dorm where the **Spirit of God has just really taken over.** I am now being led by the Holy Spirit, not leading myself like I was before. God has given me spiritual understanding of His Word and increased my knowledge of Him and Who He really is. God has given me wisdom to realize when the flesh is leading and the Spirit is not. He has been truly good to me and I thank Him for it. I don't deserve any of His goodness but He keeps looking out for me. He keeps supplying all my needs, protecting me, and healing my heartache and pain.

Since working through the Challenger and the Transformer, my appetite for the Lord has increased. Journeying through and studying the fruits of the Spirit, God has put it on my mind to look deep into my heart and confess old and hidden sins I had forgotten about. He gives me His words and lets me tap into His strength to teach others about Him. Jesus truly is my personal Lord and Savior and has brought real change into my life. I now have so much peace doing my time in jail because I see God's grace and blessings all around me. I'm at the end of the Transformer and my challenge instructed me to write a testimony since I started this program. To sum it all up, God's hand is truly on RU. His Spirit flows through it. He uses it as an avenue to heal the addicted, strengthen the believers, and increase our walk with Him. Thank you for being obedient to God and yielding to his Spirit to start this program for people like me.

RU is that Program!

From a very early age, my past was filled with drugs, violence, and alcohol. I was doing drugs with my dad at the age of 13 and had very little godly direction. Although I worked faithfully at a job to support my family and myself, the consequences of my sin and addiction affected all phases of my life for the worst.

I have been to various programs, some truly helpful. However, I realized I need a lifelong program; I believe **RU is that program!** RU is a tool that is a true blessing from God. Learning about the fruits of the Spirit has changed my heart more than any other program. Knowing what love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc. really are has been a true blessing in my walk with the Lord, and it is He who now gives me the will to express them to others more than at any other time in my life.

Although I have a long way to go, Christ has given me hope for my future to be a better husband, father, and servant of the Lord. I have been sober for over 300 days; without the RU program that God put in my life, this would be impossible. Glory be to God!

A Whole New Way of Life

SHORT TESTIMONIES... FROM BEHIND BARS

RU has helped me in so many ways. It's helped me become at peace with myself. It's opened my heart to God's Word. It has allowed me to stay strong through all the trials I have endured. Studying the principles and the Word has helped me to live the way God has intended me to live. I am so thankful for this program because I would have not come to this point in my life on my own.

Before I got into RU, I had been clean for a year and eight months, but I was not ~~happy. I was lost.~~ My life lacked meaning and purpose. I lost sight of God and what I truly care about. I saw the other girls with their RU books, Bibles, and reward tokens. I wanted what they had. So I made a conscious decision to get it. Since I started attending RU, I have been given opportunities to mend broken relationships with God, family, and myself. It has filled the void that I kept with me for so long. RU has opened up my heart and my mind to **a whole new way of life.** The patience and compassion the leaders have shown me is awesome. I have so much respect for them because they made me realize that some people can still show us that we matter, despite the mistakes we've made!

RU means a lot to me. Before RU, I never really read the Bible or incorporated it with ~~my addiction.~~ Now that these RU leaders come every Saturday into our facility for RU, I have become more involved in our Lord. I feel that since I've been saved and now walk with our Lord, I've had better strength, spiritual guidance, and joy. I just want everyone to know that RU is a great program and without it, I wouldn't be as dedicated and loyal to the Lord and my recovery.

RU means God is here with us at our facility! It is a way to become closer in our relationship to God. By knowing His Word, we know Him. In learning His Word, we learn why He created us - for Him. We learn how much He loves us. RU brings all of God, His love, His Word, and His Son to us where we are! And for that, I am grateful!



CHAPTER 5
Workers'
Testimonies

Great Works God Was Doing Within

I started in RU at another local church just to monitor and learn how to run the program. I had completed Bible Institute and my pastors wanted to start this program at our church. As I worked on the challenges, my heart began to change from, “I don’t need this personally,” to, “Wow, this is improving my walk with the Lord!” I fell in love with the other students in my group and grew closer and closer to my Lord and Savior.

We opened our local chapter in October 2010 and I have enjoyed watching the same growth from the leaders that signed on, as well as the other church members who came. God had a different plan for our chapter than the one I envisioned. Though we advertised and held many blitzes with brochures, we had no students. I was so focused on outside outreach that I failed to see **the great works God was doing within** our congregation. I became discouraged quickly, but as my pastor helped me to see the work that God was doing, I realized He had a different plan. I have continued to grow in leaps and bounds through working my challenges. God has molded me and developed me to serve in a more pure way. The Threshold book has put the finishing touches on my spiritual walk; my marriage has never been stronger. God has used these last two fruits to really shake me up, the challenges in sincerity have resonated through my whole life and exposed areas that I had no idea were ever a problem. The challenges have taught me to study and meditate instead of just reading, and to listen during prayer instead of just talking. This has changed my spiritual walk permanently. God’s timing is always perfect. As I was completing the fourth book, God opened the doors and brought four new students into our class in a way that only He can do. One of them got saved the first night and has been faithful ever since.

The most important change in me has definitely been the way I read, study, and meditate on his Word and pray, listen and respond to his leading in my everyday life. It has become nearly impossible to read or pray without having the Lord lead me in some way, shape, or form, which when applied, leads to a dynamic walk with the Lord! I am looking forward to what God is going to do in our RU Chapter, our church, and my personal life.

Tattoos, Smiles, and Bibles

My first exposure to the ministry of RU was somewhat ironic. As a doctor's assistant to a Christian chiropractor in Rockford, IL, I had the unique opportunity to interact with students from the RU Men's and Women's Schools of Discipleship when they were in need of drugless pain management. *What kind of program is this?* I wondered to myself, as I cared for the aching necks of tattooed-covered ladies wearing long skirts, world-worn faces, beaming smiles, and Bibles in their laps. Although I knew very little about addictions, and even less about RU, I distinctly remember the day the Lord planted a desire in my heart to someday be a part of this **"tattoos, smiles, and Bibles"** ministry.

Over the next four years, the Lord orchestrated a series of events which led me to becoming part of North Love Baptist Church and volunteering at the Women's School of Discipleship. My faith was immediately stretched and strengthened as I watched the power of God at work in these precious girls' lives. Their questions motivated me to dig deeper into God's Word, and I realized that the same power that was visibly changing them was the same power living inside me! My gratitude for my salvation was jump started and revived like never before.

Soon my schedule at the doctor's office changed, allowing me to join RU as a student on Friday nights. I would quietly slip in the back on my way home from a long day at work. The testimonies during 1st Talk always blessed my heart and helped put the stresses of the day back into perspective by focusing on what God was doing in the people around me. I grew stronger in my faith through the challenges; it's amazing how the Lord kept track of what "Fruit" I was on in the Strongholds and seemed to tailor-make situations throughout the week, forcing me to practice what I was learning!

However, I must say that the biggest way the Lord has used the ministry of RU in my life is through the use of the *“It’s Personal”* Daily Journal. I was raised in a godly home by wonderful Christian parents who were very involved in our church, yet I never fully understood what it meant to meditate or listen for the Lord’s voice. Oh, I was good at praying and taking my needs to the Lord, but the thought of waiting to hear what He might want to say to me was a big concern – mainly because I was so afraid I would just be making something up in my head and then attributing it to the Lord. It all seemed rather mystical and unachievable to me. Learning how to use the tool of the journal was the key the Lord used to unlock my fear and turn our relationship into something so much sweeter and deeper. I’m not scared to have a conversation with Him anymore – and it really is a conversation! I learned that the focus isn’t on “emptying my mind”, but rather on saturating it with God’s Word, then waiting for Him to show me His thoughts on a certain situation portion of Scripture. The more I let Him speak to me, and then act in obedience on what He says, the more I am learning to recognize His voice. And the best part is that this doesn’t just happen during “quiet times”; sometimes He speaks to me the clearest when I’m pushing my vacuum cleaner or washing the dishes!

The process of documenting these conversations has provided a sweet, visible track record of the Lord’s faithfulness to honor His Word and the simple faith of one of His daughters. I can look back through my old journals and watch how the Lord brought me through times of stretching and blessing, cultivating desires to be more involved with the ministry of RU, to marry a godly husband, and to love Him more. Then a few pages (or journals!) later, remember how He fulfilled those desires in His perfect time and one-of-a-kind ways. I am now privileged to be the wife of a preacher, a secretary at the RU headquarters, with a home of my own which provides many unique opportunities to show the love of Christ to the guests who come inside.

So who says RU is just for the tattooed and world-worn? I have learned that it’s the GOD of the program who can make a difference

in *anyone* and I, for one, am thankful for His living, active Spirit at work in me!

Half the Woman I Used To Be

Addictions run rampant in my family - heroin, alcohol, illicit relationships, pill popping, and other substances were all very common to me while I was growing up. Even though I had struggles, I thought for the most part I was fine; I didn't struggle with "those things".

I graduated from Bible College with a degree in Music Education, but God knows exactly what we need and when we need it! Instead of being a full time music teacher, He gave me the completely unique privilege of working in the RU Women's School of Discipleship where I get to watch the miracle working power of God changing lives on a daily basis. Until then, I was under the impression that I had no addictions. Little did I know that my life was about to be turned upside down, or should I say, right side up!

One night at work I was expecting the arrival of a new student - a young lady fighting a 2 year battle with anorexia. I saw the lights of her family's vehicle pull in the cul-de-sac in front of the Women's Home, and I watched as this emaciated young lady walked through our door. I introduced myself to her family and her mother sarcastically exclaimed, "YOU'RE going to help my daughter overcome anorexia!?"

Standing at 5'5" and weighing 309 pounds, I was morbidly obese. Although I had been 10-15 pounds overweight since middle school, because of my outgoing personality and ability to make friends, my weight never concerned me. Throughout college and into the first few years of marriage, I experienced some serious trials and responded incorrectly. Rather than turning to God, I turned to food - lots of it. The dollar menu at McDonalds became my best friend, the candy bar section at the grocery store was my counselor, buffets were my

hobby, and I won't even go in to detail about the mass quantities that I indulged in while in the privacy of my home. Ever so slowly, I journeyed up the hill of destruction until I reached the pinnacle depressed, hurting, embarrassed, and utterly defeated. I couldn't hide my addiction; I was literally a walking billboard for my sin.

The penetrating sting of those truthful words from the young lady's mother was the starting point for God to break my heart for my own sin and reveal the true meaning of Romans 12:1-2 in my life. Through the encouragement of my amazingly long-suffering husband, as well as accountability from the team of ladies who work alongside me, God enabled me to start the journey towards a healthy weight and breaking the chains of my addiction - food.

The first year was the hardest, filled with bumps in the road and short lived victories. I couldn't figure it out, until one night Principle 8 came alive to me, "You cannot fight a fleshly temptation with fleshly weapons." Just as a dope addict is unlikely to find lasting victory through methadone, the food addict (me) is unlikely to find lasting victory through diet pills, magic drops, surgeries, or other worldly methods.

With the hand of the Lord on my shoulder, today I am literally **half the woman I used to be**. One of the many verses I have clung to on this journey is Psalm 119:133, "*Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.*" Truly God has done exactly that in my life. He has ordered every step of the way and has broken the chains of iniquity that enslaved me. What I lost in physical weight, I have gained in spiritual strength. My walk with God is stronger than it has ever been, and with that, my entire outlook on ministry and people has changed. Praise God!

Although it took a very long time for me even realize I needed to call out to God and that I needed rescuing, I now know for sure that God promises never to leave or forsake His children. When we call out to Him, He will rescue us, for His Word tells us that He gives us, "all things pertaining to life and godliness".

A Remarkable Relationship

In January of 2007, we discovered that our firstborn son had a bad addiction to heroin. Not only did this jeopardize his family situation with his wife and son, it was having a negative impact on our relationship as his mother and father. After no success with two secular rehab programs, we were losing hope. Satan was accomplishing exactly what he wanted...to destroy our family.

A terrible automobile accident that could have cost him his life started a chain of events that only God could have orchestrated. A good Christian lady told us about RU, and within a couple of weeks our son was on his way to the Men's School of Discipleship in Rockford, Illinois. God worked a miracle in his life by delivering him from that terrible heroin addiction. He also restored his relationship with his family. They are now leading a godly life and serving full-time in the ministry.

But what happened to us - the mother and father? God didn't just affect our son's family situation. He worked a miracle in our life as well. While we were Christians, we were not serving God. We were living for ourselves and did not place Him as number one in our lives. After we saw what God did in our son's life, we got intimately involved with the RU chapter in our community. We began with the *Strongholds Study Course* and the "*It's Personal*" *Daily Journal*. This became our priority every morning. This brought us into **a remarkable relationship** with Jesus. He also made the relationship between the two of us so much stronger. We are now being obedient to His direction and He has blessed us so much.

We thank God every day for RU and the impact it has had on our entire family. We can personally and honestly say "...greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

A Functioning Christian

We had a revival at our church when I was about 7 years old, and the evangelist preached on hell. It nearly scared me to death. Along with a couple of my friends, we walked the aisle. When I was sixteen, my Dad (the pastor of our church) was preaching and the Holy Spirit convicted me so strongly that I had not been truly “born again”. That is when I accepted Christ as my Savior.

I have been faithful Christian for many years – faithful in church service, playing the organ, singing in a trio, teaching a Sunday school class, doing anything nearly that was asked of me. I loved the Lord and loved everything about Him. I raised four children who are serving the Lord, one of whom is an RU Chapter Director.

Five and one-half years ago he asked me if I would come and “help out” with the new RU chapter. I really didn’t feel much “compassion” for addicts, thinking that this was their choice in life. I was assigned the job of fixing the food, cleaning up, playing the piano, doing the secretarial work, and any other odd jobs that needed to be done. I actually thought to myself that I would help get this program started until they didn’t need me any longer, and then drop out. After all, this was my FRIDAY NIGHT!

The Lord had other plans for my walk with Him. I fell in love with the ministry. I started doing the challenges and enjoyed my time with God in my Daily Journal and devotions. I now refer to myself before RU as a **“functioning Christian”**. This God-given program has shown me so much and aided in developing my strong PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP with Christ. I often look at some the church members in the pews of our church, and think they are missing so very much! I know because I “sat” there myself. Many people are just “missing it”!

Two years ago, I was asked me to be a group leader. I didn't think the ladies would feel they could relate to me because I am considered "elderly" now! My son said, "Mom, many of these girls came from dysfunctional families. They need a mother figure." Oh, my, how true this is! Being retired gives me time to work with each one personally. My heart goes out to the young woman, especially those with children, who are living in constant bondage and warfare without the Lord. The average Baptist church does not have the tools, or the people to help them. I have personally seen this RU program do wonders in the lives of these ladies. I have seen homes reunited, relationships healed, and people living for the Lord. Our chapter is like family – and it is the only family that many have known. It is the first time many of our students have seen a genuine love for them, first learning of Christ's love, and then out love. Studying the fruits of righteousness, and recognizing the works of the flesh, dissecting and defining – all of these things teach us what Christ wants for our lives. It equips us to live in this old world. He wants us to have a full, abundant life in Him.

I am forever grateful for the personal relationship that I now have with my Savior and for the leading of the Holy Spirit through the RU program. I am grateful that I am no longer just a *functioning Christian*.

Then Came RU...

My time at RU has quickly gone by, and yet I feel as if I have been a part of it for years and years. Initially, I was interested in RU to help others. I was a part of the jail ministry and felt RU would be an excellent program to recommend to the ladies there, especially those who were so bound by their addiction that the jail became a part of their life. However, God had other plans for me. I am helping others, but God has gotten hold of me... *finally!*

I had searched my entire Christian life to gain a constant, effectual relationship with God. I read my Bible, prayed, memorized Scripture, went soul winning, went on visitations, worked in several church ministries, yet there was always a lacking in my Christian life. Oh, I knew about the wonderful fellowship one could have with God because, at times, I had it. Yet there was no consistency in my fellowship with the Lord.

Then came RU, the place where I was supposed to be going to help others. It was there that I secured the tools which have allowed me to have the relationship with the Lord I have so long desired. The challenges caused me to examine some of the strongholds I had that I wasn't even aware of having. They also helped me to hone the skills I did have to become more productive for the Lord. The most important lesson I learned was that I had Christ in me, and I needed to allow Him to live through me every day in every way, at all times. When He is in control, my life is great no matter what the circumstances.

When I allow Christ to guide my life, I have the fellowship I so desperately desire. It was appropriate to end the challenges with sincerity vs. hypocrisy. God wants us, but He wants the real us. He wants to behave in such a way that others will want what we have

and not say, “Well, if he or she is a Christian, then I am too!” That is my desire: to be a real Christian. I want to make Christ look good to everyone I meet.

RU is absolutely the ultimate discipleship program. The tools are all there so that any Christian desiring a close daily walk with the Lord can achieve this goal, then show others how to as well. If they fail, as I do, the Lord in His great mercy is just waiting for us to turn back to Him, ask for forgiveness, and continue on with Him. What a great God we serve!

They Sure Have Helped Me

Here is a little history about me: I was saved in the 5th grade. I was a bus kid. I have been attending a local Baptist church for about 30 years. Shortly after joining the church, I became a bus captain. I absolutely loved those kids. We did so many things with them outside of church. We took them bowling, fishing, and skating. My heart was definitely bent towards those kids. Little did I know, God had other plans in store for me.

In January 2007, a new ministry was opening up in our church and God 'asked' me to work in it. It was RU. I absolutely refused. I was not even going to consider it. NO WAY!!! I was not going to work in two large ministries and I was I was not going to give up my bus route. (Anyone in RU that reads this next statement- please forgive me). There was no way I was going to work all week taking care of patients at work and then take care of drunks and addicts on Friday night. There was no way I was going to waste my time with those people. NO WAY!!! Well, you can only tell God "no" so many times.

I was convicted but not convinced; and yet, I finally gave myself to the RU ministry. Just because I finally told God okay, doesn't mean I didn't go kicking and screaming. It took many weeks of messages (of course these messages were just for me) and private talks with the RU Director for me to humble myself and change my attitude. Just in case you can't tell, I am a very strong willed person. I had to realize that I did have something to offer "these people" and since God is no respecter of persons, why am I?

Since becoming a RU women's leader, my eyes have been opened. There are so many people struggling and those drunks and

addicts that I envisioned are real people, with real struggles. I have also found out that RU is not just about drunks and addicts. It's about leading people to Christ and trying to get them into a closer relationship with Christ. It's about working thru marriage issues, children issues, and co-worker issues. It's about trying to focus our lives on God, not on ourselves. And yes, I have greatly changed since starting RU. I have grown closer to my Savior. I have learned that some of these students just need to be loved - loved for themselves, no matter what they have done or who they have become. God says that I should not love the sin but that I should certainly love the sinner.

Over the last 6 years, I have realized, "there go I but by the grace of God." I am sinner just as any of these students and in God's eyes no one sin is nay worse than another. Someone's drinking, drugging, or adultery is no different than my language difficulties or stubbornness. They are all strongholds in God's eyes. God makes no mistakes. He knew what He was doing when he pulled me from my beloved bus route and put me into the RU ministry. I feel I am now more compassionate, I am more tolerant of other's mistakes. Not to say that I still don't have attitude problems or that I still don't say 'no' to God, but I am more open to the struggles of others. I don't know if the students feel that I have helped them but **they sure have helped me.**

I Wish I Had Known

I have been a Christian for 61 years. Before pastoring the church where I currently work, I was a missionary in New Guinea. For years I struggled there because I fought for my rights, as the tribal people stole my pineapples and everything else. I worked for six and half years with no converts. I finally surrendered my rights. The natives said *“Tuan, you have become a Christian”* because I did not get angry anymore. (Tuan means “chivalrous lord”) Today, all glory to God, they are believers.

Fast forward many years...now I am pastoring in the States and our church started the RU Program. Oh how **I wish I had known** the truths your RU program teaches long ago!

What did me so good was the love vs. self-love truth. My focus has always been on the “returns”. The truth of joy and rejoicing...I did not connect with frustration, which I did not look at as sin. The challenges on longsuffering with the shortcomings of others have taught me so much about me. The fear of causing friction and discord which caused a fear of men and hampered my witnessing and soul winning...I was in bondage as a self-righteous Christian for too many years!

I could go on and on about the things I have learned. I had never kept a journal before the RU program, and this now is such a blessing and has produced so much growth in me. There are so many blessings in my old age (78) and I praise and worship God for each day! Thank you, thank you, thank you for starting and providing the RU program!



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