

GOD RESCUED ME FROM HATE

I spent a number of years as a law enforcement officer, many of which were spent hating the very people that needed the most help in my community. In law enforcement you deal with the same people over and over again. Many are stuck in a cycle of addiction, abuse, etc. Law enforcement call it the revolving door at the jail.

Because I dealt with the same people over and over again, I didn't believe that people could actually change. I heard the same story over and over again, "I'm trying to do better, I really want to change." I didn't believe them. I figured that my job didn't make a bit of difference in the lives of the people I was arresting, they simply didn't want to change. I became so cynical that I developed a hatred for criminals, the people I was arresting and taking to jail. This cynicism and hatred spread like a cancer in my heart and affected the way I thought, the way I spoke, and the way I acted. It was poisonous.

In 2011 I began a class at The Way called The Journey. I took this class with a black, convicted felon who was going deeper in his faith. We were leery of each other, we put up walls, and I certainly didn't want to be vulnerable with him in the room. God had other plans. Through that class I began to see the heart of my new friend. Even though he was a convicted felon, that's not who he identified himself as. Instead, he was a child of God, a new creation! This man was different and had I not known him to be a former criminal I never would have guessed it. He spoke differently, he acted differently, he was a man who loved Jesus and was pursuing him passionately.

God used that class and my new friend to break down walls. God spoke to my heart and said, "You see, people do change, but they only change because of me." In that, God began to soften my heart. Just like the Lord spoke in Ezekial 36, God took out my stony stubborn heart and gave me a new heart, one that was tender and responsive.

It was a process, but I began to see the "criminals" I was dealing with as people. People who were stuck, broken, and desperately needing help. My heart hurt for them and I wanted to help. In 2013 my friend and I started a ministry dedicated to helping people who struggle with addictions. We wanted to create a place where people could overcome their addictions in the name of Jesus, be set free from their past identity and be given a new identity in the name of Jesus Christ. We called it Discover Hope 517 after the scripture 2 Corinthians 5:17, *"This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"* Those who were struggling with addiction did not have to cling to their past mistakes, their past identity, forever labeling themselves as an addict, instead, those that called on Jesus as their Lord and Savior got to call themselves a Child of God. This ministry was started up shortly before the unrest that occurred in Ferguson, MO. During this time, the national media told us that white cops (me) and black men (my friend) should hate each other, that we could not get along, that cops were racist and black men should be afraid. God had different plans for me and my friend and He showed us that unity can be found in Christ, even though the world says it can't.

God took my hatred and developed a heart that hurt for the people I encountered on the streets. Some people didn't want to change, but some did, and those were the ones that gave me hope. Hope that my job was making a difference and that I could see them change their lives in the name of

Jesus. The battle they face is real, and some returned to prison, some even died, but others fully surrendered to Christ and are now changing lives in the name of Jesus. They share the gospel and give hope to those in the midst of their struggles. They understand their testimonies were given to them for a reason and for a purpose. Who knows maybe you will be the person God uses to give hope and share love with the very people the world says you should hate...