

CAUGHT UP!

(My Story)

By

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Preface

Although it took me awhile in deciding how to share this book with you, I had to create a persona of experience while I educated myself in expression. In learning this method, I have found that effective expression is not about the facts. Therefore, I have striven to share with you, through history, something that has given me “The True Light” of all that has happened in my life. I have chosen to change certain names out of respect to their privacy. In addition, I want to show you how we all have our own moments of nebulous wanderings that occasionally lead to unfortunate destinies filled with divinely, illuminated purposes.

The thought of people receiving help by reading how God used each of my shortcomings to fulfill His purpose satisfies my soul. I have never felt more strongly than I do now about the healing that God has in store for all who decide to allow Him and the power of His Holy Spirit to transform their lives. Being set free from spiritual burden is one of the most important aspects of recovery. These thoughts are what motivate me and gives me an opportunity to share in the joy Christ expected because of bearing our sin on the cross. As I write these words, I am going through one of the most difficult times of my life. Actually, this is the culmination of years of spiritual and physical bondage resulting in the loss of jobs,

homes, material possessions, and consequentially, relationships. Nevertheless, God's mercy has truly had an impact on my life. He has given me a new life with a supremely pleasing purpose.

I thank God daily for everything I have experienced---Good and bad. Now, I truly know that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (*Romans 8:28, NKJV*).

"The meaning of GOOD and BAD, of BETTER or WORSE, Is simply HELPING or HURTING"

---Ralph Waldo Emerson

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Chapter One

"I rebelled against His commandment . . . and . . . have gone into captivity" (*Lamentations 1:18, NKJV*).

Not Again?

"Aw man, here we go again!" The emotions that swept over me were

extremely familiar. In those few moments, a panoramic view of my past, present, and future life came into high-definition. How could I have allowed myself to be mixed up in something like this? I never thought, I would be in this type of situation. This is ridiculous. What is wrong with me? In addition, why am I being caught up constantly?

Of all the upsetting things in my life, this one takes the cake. Actually, 2009 was a year of all types of shocking things. Michael Jackson died at the age of 50. Senator Edward "Ted" Kennedy, a fixture in the Senate for 46 years, died of brain cancer at the age of 77. A shooting at the Fort Hood army post in Texas killed 13 and injured 29. Ten of the people killed were military personnel. Major Nidal Malik Hasan, an Army Specialist, was charged with 13 counts of premeditated murder for this incident. A

Nigerian man on a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit allegedly attempted to ignite an explosive device hidden in his underwear. The alleged bomber,

Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, told officials later that the terrorist group Al Qaeda directed him. Then here I was tripping and gone off the deep end.

It's September 23, 2009 and I was now sitting in the Hiram, Georgia Police Department Precinct with my arms behind my back secured by a shiny, silver bracelet that somehow wants to become my lifelong friend. The room was bare except for two wood-stained desks and two office

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recliner chairs that looked more inviting than the menacing metal chair where they sat me. Then they began to question me. "Sir would you like to tell us what took place?" "I already told you what happened," I said. Of course, when being interrogated how many people would immediately tell the truth, especially, when the incident was so fresh?

The tidal waves of feeling, running through my veins kept me frantically on edge. All I could continually say was "nothing happened, nothing happened, and nothing happened!" My head was spinning in so many different directions I didn't know what to say to tell you the truth. The one picture that kept coming back to my mind, unfortunately, was a set of bars.

I have never been more afraid than I was then in my entire life. Literally, in those brief moments I began to feel like a dead man. Like one of those zombies off the television show, "The Walking Dead." At least, they had an agenda. Eat. Eat. Eat. I didn't even have that. You know how detectives like to calm you when questioning you by offering you a cigarette, a drink, or sometimes even something to eat? Well, I wasn't even offered any of that. Besides, I don't smoke. However, if they had asked me if I wanted any of those things I would have said "What for? I'm a dead man," although, if I'd said that it would have made me look guilty of something. In that instance, I had lost all hope.

Then I began to pray silently. I mean, I prayed as if I had never prayed before. I knew that God was the only One who could help me now. The men before me were invisible. My vision was focused on one thing---jail bars. If I have ever needed God's help this couldn't have been more of a time.

"Dear Father, please help me. I don't know what to say except have mercy on my soul. I know You have heard this plea countless times from me but I know You are a long-suffering, merciful and gracious God. Please hear my prayer. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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Two Years Earlier

It's 2007 in Savannah, Georgia, also known as the C-Port because of having one of the busiest import/export sites across the whole eastern coastlines of the U.S. called the Georgia Ports of authority. "During World War II . . . great quantities of military supplies of all kinds passed through the Port of Savannah on their way to various fronts" (*Carpenter, 1967*). This is also a town where it is said that one

of the largest St. Patrick's Day celebrations in the nation is held. Tourists come from all over to digest some of our southern hospitality and enjoy our other annual festivities, especially the food and fun that is offered on River Street in Downtown Savannah. It is just beyond the park squares with beautiful monuments and shaded with huge trees draped with boughs full of moss that are located between streets that run parallel and perpendicular. They may choose to ride out to Tybee Island to take big whiffs of that salty, nostalgic breeze wafting in onto the beach from the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. We even use to have an annual event full of amusement rides, buttered popcorn, cotton candy, games, and exhibits at our Coastal Empire fair but it has recently left us after many years of blessing us with so many exciting moments. Many folks return each year to pick up where they left off or to get some more of what they received the previous year. Some even decide to snatch up their roots and replant them here in this city of rich heritage.

This is my hometown and I have always loved it myself, otherwise, long ago I would have even relocated. I had so many wonderful times here. However, my poor choices began here. In August of this year and newly released from a previous incarceration I had all intentions of getting my life back on track. I had renewed communion with the Lord, and I truly felt empowered that all was going to work out right. Actually, I almost didn't have a place to parole

out to. My grandmother is now deceased but when the department of Corrections decided to verify my address, which I assumed she would allow me to parole to her home, she unfortunately said, "No!" Therefore, someone at the administration level decide to allow me to parole to a homeless shelter. They had just begun a new partnership with the DOC to allow parolees a funded by the state three-month stay. This would be the first time I knew of this ever happening for a parolee. In hindsight, I see how god was working for me even then. At this shelter, I was given my own room to live in. I even had my own key. It was furnished with twin beds, a dresser drawer, and a 19-inch color TV. I had this room all to myself. I was given access to a full bathroom that was shared by a few other residents. They actually paid for their keep by working at the shelter.

I'd like to say here that I have two lovely children---Shante' Latrice Preston, my daughter, and Fredric Eugene Preston, Jr., my son. On my release, my daughter, who was 20 years of age at that time, did a wonderful deed for me. She had already purchased several items of clothing and personal needs for me. I felt truly blessed by this.

Once I was settled in the first thing that I did was contacted my old employer which was an Electrical Company. I enjoyed being an Electrician by trade so I thought it would be best for me. Thankfully, I was glad that when I spoke with my previous supervisor, he was interested in rehiring me.

Therefore, I was now employed but I didn't have transportation. The shelter offered me bus passes for public transportation. I was so elated by all the things that were falling in place. I fell into a regular pattern of work, shelter, work, shelter. I forgot to mention that I even had use of my own company van, but I was not allowed to drive it home.

In this entire time, do you see where anything was missing, or not being acknowledged? Well, I was about to learn this the hard way. I guess, I began to get complacent in what God was restoring for me.

In addition, I was reunited with a female acquaintance that I had met while I was in the Chatham County Detention Center. For the sake of recognition in my story, I will call her Annie. She had shown herself to be supportive of me throughout my previous incarceration. Although, she had her own troubling past issues, as well. She was a recovering drug addict.

It seems that my focus affected by this new occurrence. I began to spend most of my free time away from work with Annie. Except for the fact that everything seemed OK, I started returning later and later to the shelter. There was a curfew at 3:00 o'clock a.m. and one night I didn't make it in time. It didn't take long before another resident informed the administrator.

As my mindset was beginning to allow pride to show itself, I missed many opportunities to volunteer my help around the shelter. It soon came back on me. Because on hearing of my tardiness, it was a ripe

occasion for her to use that, besides my not seeming to need any help now that I was employed, as a reason to ask me to relocate. I can't say I was hurt but I was shocked. Now I had a few days to move. It's a good thing, I still had my job. At least, for that moment I did. I was soon to find out that when it rains it pours. Consequently, Annie and I moved to the Guesthouse, a weekly lodge that was near my new employment.

As each day went by, I began to feel as if the owner of the company I worked for was not too happy with my return. You see, I had left on not so good terms. I was in a leadership role of several electrical projects, including another worker. Then I was "caught up" by the police department. Time and time again. What a web I weaved.

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I believe that as a result, the owner seemed to have acquired a personal vendetta towards me. One day at the end of a shift, on Friday---payday, I was in such a rush to get to the bank to cash my check that when I pulled into the company yard I jumped out so quick that I forgot my checkbook on the console. Nevertheless, that wasn't the problem. The problem was I had just left a job site that was full of mud and my van was a turbid eyesore, especially being an allwhite van. I didn't realize how serious this was until that Monday morning. I was called into the owner's office and he pretty much chewed my head off, so to speak. Like one of them zombies, I earlier spoke about. I mean he really poured it on. He threw in the fact that I left my checkbook as if that's how I would treat his electrical projects. He gave me a week to be gone. Talking about being struck with a curve ball, I felt as if I was hit with a bowling ball. "What am I going to do?" I thought. Whom you're going to call when these things happen? LORD GOD ALMIGHTY!

Fortunately, Annie was employed and continued to pay our rent until I found another job. Meanwhile, I began to drink alcohol again. It started with just a few beers a day. A few weeks went by, and once again, the Lord GOD blessed me with a job at another electrical company. We decided to move to another weekly lodge that was closer to this new employer. I didn't have a company van this time. God had something else in mind. He opened an opportunity for me to purchase a van. God is so good!

Annie had a friend who owned a cab company. He had an Astro van that he was retiring so he sold it to me for \$800.00 dollars on consignment. Not only did God give me a van, after checking out of the guesthouse and a brief stay at my sister's apartment, this friend of hers also allowed us to rent a room in his extremely large, white Victorian-styled three bedroom home. It had a huge side yard of beautiful lush green grass. We had use of a full kitchen, a guest

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bathroom, including cable TV services, and all other utilities included for \$150.00 dollars per week. That was a blessing because a few months later I was able to purchase a pre-owned Dodge Stratus. I sold the van for \$1000.00 dollars.

Weeks later Annie relapsed. Can you imagine what that did to me emotionally? I became so depressed that I briefly allowed myself to do something that I hadn't done in almost 14 years--snort cocaine. This scared the living daylights out of me so bad that I knew I had to leave that environment. In the process of me looking for a way out, I met someone special. It gave me an additional incentive to change my location. In a way, I felt bad bailing like that because the owner of the home had been so good to me.

One day when Annie was at work, I loaded all my belongings in my Dodge Stratus and moved to Stone Mountain, Georgia located at the Southeastern part of Atlanta, Georgia. It is said, "Stone Mountain, near Atlanta, in its own right is one of the geological wonders of the world--the largest single granite boulder in existence. Will Rogers once called it a pebble that California threw at Florida and missed" (*Carpenter, 1967*). To me this was a place filled with a diversity of culture. I realized quickly that without transportation it would be difficult really to make it in this town. I put many miles on my vehicle in a short amount of time looking for employment too. In addition, the traffic was crazy because I was not used to so many lanes in a road. Moving here was actually an invitation from my brother. He allowed me to reside in his apartment until I was re-employed. Of course, this didn't last long. Right after I had gotten another electrical job, my brother's apartment was burglarized. Everything I had newly acquired since being released from prison was now stolen, except for a Milwaukee combination drill set. I later learned that the burglars were young teenagers. I guess, they didn't realize the value of a tool like that. They took electronics, a PlayStation, and a few video games.

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As I said previously I had the opportunity of meeting another woman right before I left Savannah who actually turned out to be the best thing that has ever happened to me. We actually met on a dating website. Her name is Debbie. She is Caucasian and partly Blackfoot Indian. She is beautiful with the most captivating long hair and an elegant personality that I had ever had the opportunity to find. We both agreed that we were a good match with me being 5'8" and she being about 5'2". She is the most considerate, kind, and loving woman I have ever known.

After the burglary, I realized staying with my brother wasn't working out too well. Therefore, I rented a room in another beautiful home from a woman who reminded me so much of my mother. I had missed my mother terribly; she had passed away in 1998.

It was a brief stay because my relationship with Debbie progressed and I relocated to Hiram, Georgia located at the Southwestern part of Atlanta, Georgia. Not only did my feelings for her influence this decision, it was also practical because I was burning I-20 up by my constant trips spending time with her on the weekends. Thank goodness, I had a GPS or I would have gotten lost many times. It was a town where I was told had recently grown rapidly commercially. Therefore, we didn't have much of a problem in finding a plush condominium that was located near all the busiest activity of the city. It was so wonderful. However, by this time I had allowed myself to deviate from God's purposes so bad that trouble was inevitable. Only she didn't know this. I was once again damaged goods.

The old pattern of work, women, and booze had crept its way back into my life. Although I was trying to put forth my best effort to be a person of responsibility on the surface, underneath it all the demons

of corruption had taken shelter again. I had gotten far away from my old lifestyle. However, I was being continually attacked through every man's battle---lust.

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As I reflect, I know that idle time is the devil's workshop. You see, there came times when I was between electrical projects. I was receiving most of my work now through a skilled laborstaffing agency. The assignments lasted sometimes a few weeks up to six months. Between each job, I qualified for unemployment compensation. Nevertheless, having no work and nothing else productive in its place was one of my biggest downfalls, add alcohol to that and it was a dangerous combination. In addition, I began to visit beer parlors again.

Although Debbie was not a stranger herself to the bar scene she was not a frequent barhopper as I was. Her famous words were, "I only went with you because you wanted to go." She was employed but our work schedules didn't always harmonize. Sometimes she worked nights and sometimes days. I always worked weekdays only.

During this time, my car began to need costly repairs. I was afraid that I would be without transportation. It needed a new radiator, air compressor, and, a racket & pinion. At the time, I was not financially able to fix the car. So Debbie's daughter, Carrie, lent me \$500.00 dollars to either fix the Dodge or find something else. She is a hardworking, kind, and generous soul. God is so good.

He allowed me to meet someone who owned a radiator shop that fixed all these things. The owner also had a yard full of unclaimed vehicles. He had a 1997 Mercury Marquis that needed a motor. "How much do you want for it?" I asked. "I have a motor for it, and I'll let you have it for \$1800.00 dollars." "I have \$500.00 dollars right now; would you hold it for me?" "I tell you what. If you give me that \$500.00 dollars now, I will go ahead and put the motor in it. I will call you when it's ready and then you can pay me the rest at \$100.00 dollars per week until it's paid." I was flabbergasted.

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Here it was a man whom I didn't know that was deciding to trust me by word-of-mouth to finance a vehicle. It's amazing how God still permits blessings to fall on us even when we are not full aligning with His purposes. However, who am I to say that it wasn't a part of His plan all along. This puts me in the mind of the words of Jesus Christ about how the Father operates. "He makes the sun rise on the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust." (*Matthew 5:45, NKJV*).

A few weeks later, when I contacted the owner he said the motor he had would not fit the car. "I will be going to Florida soon to pick up some vehicles at a car auction. Hopefully I may find a motor to fit the Mercury." I guess, he really wanted to make this sale. On the other hand, maybe he just didn't want to give me my down payment back. Alternatively, it could have just been what God had ordained.

A week or so later, when I called when I called him, the car was ready. When I picked it up it ran like a charm. I told him how well it ran and he seemed regretful. I found out later that the motor he found

actually turned out to be better than the one he originally had. However, the price was set. I gave him everything just like he requested, every week until it was paid. I was never late.

I suppose, I gained a solid trusting relationship from this experience. I probably could go to his shop today, and he would trust me to do the same thing again. Thanks to the LORD. It seemed as if everything was looking up for me. I now had a new car. Finally, I was reassigned on another project. Moreover, life went on. Then the job ended. Debbie and I began to argue a lot. I have to say this though most of the squabbles were based on her suspicions of my peculiar behavior.

Between the alcohol, idle time, and quarrels things were rapidly unraveling. My foolish shenanigans were beginning to catch up with me. Although I had professed to love Debbie, her woman's intuition did not think things were right. One day we got into a ruckus that got so out of hand it ended with physical violence. It wasn't a big brawl or anything but let's just say her anger got the best of her. Seconds later, I felt extremely sorry. I have never been a violent person, especially not a woman beater.

This scared the living daylights out of me. I immediately remembered, I was on parole and I thought that I might wind up in jail behind my behavior. Therefore, the following day while Debbie was at work I packed up all my things and left.

I know you may be thinking to yourself that it sounds like I was the wrong party in most of my situations. On the surface, you may be a bit right. Nevertheless, you would have to remember that no one is perfect. I'm only telling you these things that I did because this is *my* story. Therefore, I humbly accept responsibility. I do realize my choices were terrible. I will not deny that. With that said---a month later I returned to Debbie. I had missed her awfully. This showed me how much I really cared about her. However, as an immature, irresponsible person I never claimed to be a master at showing the love that I professed to have. Usually my actions made me look like an adult child. I know that is not an excuse. Later, you will see and understand why I am willing to wear that label. Of course, it is my hope to not be stuck in that condition forever.

After I returned, it wasn't long before the old routine returned---slowly but surely, step by step, inch by inch. Then---I was "caught up!" The one thing I have always dreaded actually happened. I was now, in police custody for something that is so dreadful. Then I prayed the most sincere prayer that I have ever prayed.

The LORD knew what exactly it would take fully to get my attention. He surely got it good this time. This is the lowest of the lows, the worst of the worst. Like Fred Sanford on television said, "This is the big one