

# Testimony of Pastor Terry Long

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## *THE TESTIMONY OF SENIOR PASTOR TERRY LONG*

*AS TRANSCRIBED FROM A MESSAGE GIVEN AT CALVARY CHAPEL OF SALT LAKE IN 1994.*

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8 (NKJV)

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I want to share this scripture with you because it explains why I came to Christ. When I was without hope, Christ died for me. When I was against Him, He loved me. It was those thoughts that drew me to the cross.

As a kid, I was a rotten little monster. I used to spit on the ground and say, "Look! I am spitting in the face of Jesus." I knew I was being blasphemous, but I didn't care. It didn't matter to me that I would have to stand before God someday, because I was just living for the present.

I liked blasphemous music, too. I loved listening to groups like Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath. They openly praised Satan and ridiculed the Lord Jesus Christ. I can still recall some of the words from *Nativity in Black*, one of the very first songs Black Sabbath released:

"Look into my eyes; you will see who I am  
My name is Lucifer, please take my hand!"

I took Lucifer's hand, on a bathroom floor at seventeen, while overdosing on LSD. In agony, and convinced I was about to die, I yelled out, "God, You won't help me. You don't care! I'll turn to Satan, and he'll help me." Kneeling on that ceramic floor, wracked with pain, I prayed to Satan and asked him to become my lord and my god. I asked him to give me power. Power to live and power to take control of my life. There was a God-shaped vacuum in my heart, and I invited Satan to fill it. Needless to say, Satan didn't do anything to help me. I was still hurting, physically and emotionally. That hurt just kept getting deeper and deeper.

It was for times like this, when I was against God, ruining my life and blaspheming His name that Christ died for me. In those times when I spit in His face and rejected Him, He loved me. That love drew me to the cross.

The Apostle Paul writes, "God demonstrates His love toward us that when we were still sinners (when we were without hope), Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

The word, "demonstrates," here is a fascinating one. I looked this verse up in sixteen different versions of the Bible. There are many different verbs used to convey this concept: to command, to show, to prove, to display, to manifest.

All those words, trying to define what it means for God to demonstrate His love. It's the idea of a merchant polishing his merchandise before presenting it to a customer, similar to a master jeweler putting a diamond on display. He determines the best cut, then polishes each of the fifty-eight facets one by one. He places the jewel on a black velvet background, and shines a light on it to bring out all its sparkle and fire. He wants everyone to see the glory within that jewel.

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That's how it is with God, demonstrating his love for us. He gives us the very best and shows it for the entire world to see. While I was still a rebellious kid, killing myself with drugs and hurtling straight toward hell, Christ died for my sins.

It took me a long time to learn that lesson, though. I remember watching a Billy Graham crusade on TV when I was a kid. I was a rebellious, sinful young man but I could feel Reverend Graham's words touching me. They were making sense. I tried to fight it. I kept telling myself, "Okay, so God loves me," but I didn't want to respond to that love. At the end of his message, Rev. Graham invited everyone to commit their lives to Christ. I said no.

I didn't want to wear a three-piece suit, comb my hair every day, or do any of the other things I thought Christianity was all about. I didn't want anyone telling me what to do. I didn't want to be a Christian. UGH! They were so creepy to me.

I was deceived. I didn't know what Christianity was about, so I rejected God's invitation. I know if I had died that day, I would have received my heart's desire. I would have spent the rest of eternity without God. But God refused to give up on me. He still chose to work in my heart. In fact, looking back on my life, I see that God had been working on me all along.

When I was about six years old, our neighbors across the street took me to a Baptist revival meeting. This guy carried a big tub of sand onto the stage and waved a magnet over it. Hundreds of little black particles jumped up to the magnet. He said, "You know, there will come a day when Jesus Christ will return to this world. See how these tiny black particles are jumping through the air and being pulled to the magnet? That is how God's children are going to go meet Him in the air." As he shared that, I was scared to death. Jesus Christ was coming back, and he was going to take his people away! I didn't want to be left behind.

When the speaker invited everyone to receive Jesus into their lives, I raised my hand because I didn't want to go to hell. I knew that I wasn't a good kid. I knew that I needed Jesus. By the next day, however, I had completely forgotten the whole thing. In fact, I didn't remember it until years after my conversion. I went my own way, turning away from God, yet, all through my life; His cry of love was still there.

My grandfather grew marijuana. He's the one who introduced me to drugs. I started using when I was about twelve years old. By ninth grade I was totally involved in the drug scene, drowning myself in marijuana, LSD and speed. I sold these drugs to other kids as well. By taking drugs, I was telling the world, "Somebody pay attention to me because I'm empty and hurting. If you don't, I'm going to destroy my life! I'm going to do these drugs and make sure other kids take them too. I'm going to kill myself and I'm taking other people with me!"

Throughout that time though, I knew people were praying for me. People like my grandmother, a godly woman who knew and loved the Lord. Others were praying for me, too, sometimes people I didn't even know.

Once, at the unemployment agency, the woman behind the counter was talking to me about job opportunities. As I started to walk away she said, "Young man, come here."

I went back and asked, "What do you want?"

"I want you to know that I'm praying for you," she said.

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I thought, Lady, you are weird, but her words hounded me. Here was somebody who didn't even know me, yet she pulled me out of a crowd to say she was praying for me. It was that cry of love again. I heard it time and time again as God protected me from myself.

My family and I moved to Placerville, California when I was a teenager. I was still selling LSD and speed. After we smoked some PCP, one of the young men I was selling speed with pulled out his dad's .38 special. He put a bullet in the chamber, spun it, and then pointed the gun at my head. He pulled the trigger and, click! Laughing, he put another bullet in the chamber. Even doped up and not thinking straight, I could tell I was in trouble, so I ran for my life. A few weeks later, the same guy kidnapped and killed a family that lived nearby. Even then, God was protecting me from myself.

Our family moved again, this time to Sacramento. My dad was building a house. For a while, I chose to live there during its construction. One night, I brought this street person home with me because he didn't have any place to stay except his beat-up car. I thought it was weird that he brought his gun along as he came into the house. I asked myself, what is this guy doing? Why is he bringing his weapon along?

We got high that night and I watched him until he passed out. Quietly, I took his gun away, and stuck it under my pillow, then passed out myself. The next morning I woke up to the sound of his car driving off. I thought, All right! I've got his gun. Then I looked under my pillow and it was gone. I didn't think twice about it at the time, but after I got saved the Lord showed me that this man had every intention of killing me that night. Once again, God protected me from my own foolishness. He loved me even though my entire life was messed up.

I met my wife Alison when we were fifteen years old. She wasn't into Satan and blasphemy like me, but she had her own rocky past. At that tender age she was already sexually active and heavily into drugs, alcohol and the partying scene. Just the kind of girl I was looking for. On our first date I knew she was going to be my wife.

Alison got pregnant at fourteen, just a year before I met her. There weren't many crisis pregnancy centers in 1977 and she didn't know where to turn. When her mother found out, she took Alison to the county clinic. She was never given any options or time to think about her situation. The emotional scars from her abortion ran deep, so she buried her pain in drugs and alcohol. Often, I would just hold her while she cried. It wasn't until years later, after she became a Christian, that those scars were finally healed.

Alison and I started living together when we were seventeen. Although Alison worked at a plant nursery and I had a construction job, because of our drugs and alcohol, we never had enough money to go around. Our poor lifestyle actually put Alison in the hospital where the doctor told her that we needed to start eating better. For the first two years we lived on potatoes, Top Ramen noodles, and lots of alcohol. Combined with our druggie lifestyle, it was a slow ride to death.

I made life a living hell for Alison. I loved her, but I was also abusive and insanely jealous. I beat up guys because I thought they found her attractive. I shouted at her all the time. Many times I told her to leave. I would say, "Go away, I don't need you in my life!" One day, just a few weeks before I met Jesus, I was sitting on our front porch with my .22 caliber pistol. I was upset with Alison. I looked down at my gun, took aim at her car and fired. I squeezed the trigger again and again, and again. Before long, I had shot my initials into the side of her car. She was forced to drive it to work, bullet holes and all.

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I was on the road to self-destruction and I was taking her with me. My life had no meaning. I still have the letter B lightly etched on my arm, where I started a tattoo that would have said, "Born to Lose." Those three words summed up my dreams and aspirations at the age of seventeen. In my young mind, I had no hope and no future.

After we turned eighteen, we got married and moved into some tiny old military houses that have since been torn down. One group of bikers lived in the house to our right, and another group lived in the house across the street. We learned that our neighbors to the left were growing marijuana plants in their yard. All those people were totally into drugs and we said to ourselves, "This is the perfect neighborhood for us."

We made friends with our next-door neighbors, the marijuana growers. One day, while they were at the store I pulled a board out of our dividing fence. I shoved Alison through the hole and she ripped out all four of his marijuana plants, and then ducked back into our yard. That's right, we stole from our neighbors, our friends. We were really good pals to have in those days.

We used our bedroom as a greenhouse. We had hydroponics plants and a grow light. I covered our window with tin foil, to keep anyone from noticing our little crop. Eventually, we grew about a hundred marijuana plants. Alison and I smoked some of the pot then sold the rest to help pay our bills. We even sold some of the stolen marijuana back to our neighbor, who never suspected he was buying his own merchandise. The extra money helped our financial situation, but it was never quite enough to meet our needs.

It was at that point that the Lord started to work a miracle in our lives.

Merle and Paul were two of our other neighbors. Merle was in her late forties. Paul, on the other hand, was in his early twenties and they were living together. They were into drugs, partying, and alcohol, just like Alison and me, but they were also into the Bible. I thought this was really weird. Whenever we went to their place to smoke dope, we would all get loaded, turn out the lights, light candles, open up the Bible and read the Book of Revelation. We didn't actually study the Word, mind you; rather, it was just a spooky thing for us to do. We would read all the weird symbolism and tales of destruction, then get a kick out of scaring ourselves while loaded on drugs.

But the Lord knew exactly how to reach me because I started to read the Bible on my own. I would look through the words and say "There's something here, isn't there?" I came across the passages in Romans that said God loved me even though I was a sinner, and that Christ died for me. I knew my life was empty, so I said, "If You are real and all this is real, then I am asking You to help me right now. I know that Merle and Paul don't have the answer because they have no more hope than I do. Show me the way." And I opened up the phone book.

Inside I found dozens of churches listed and I wondered which one to call. "There are so many churches here," I said. "You have to guide me in this, because I don't know what I'm doing. Guide me to the church that You want." I closed my eyes and said, "Guide my finger. Show me which church to call. Send me someone that will help me." I put my finger down in the middle of the page and it pointed to Cyprus Avenue Baptist Church. I called and reached Dick Spangenberg, the assistant pastor. I said, "Come out here right now. I want to get saved."

He was taken aback. "What?"

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I answered, "You've got to come out right now. I want to get saved because I've been reading the Bible and I see that there is a God, and there is a Satan. I also see that Jesus is coming back real soon so get over here now because if He comes back before you get here I'm lost!" So he drove out that night.

We lived on a dark, dead end street, with no streetlights, in a seedy-looking neighborhood. Big dogs roamed the area to protect our marijuana crops. I watched from the window that night as Pastor Spangenberg pulled down the street and stopped at the end. As I went out to meet him, he turned around and jettied off down the street and didn't come back. "What are you doing?" I yelled. "I want to get saved!"

I called him the next day and said, "Why did you leave? I want to get saved."

He said "I'm not getting out of my car in that neighborhood alone, in the middle of the night. If you want me to come out, then meet me outside."

I said, "Okay, I can handle that."

We met the next day and Dick explained to me that I was a sinner, and that Christ died for me. He said the only hope I could find would be in Christ Jesus. I thought it sounded like a prepared message, and was kind of long. As he went on with his spiel, I found myself, listening, agreeing with everything he said and thinking, Come on, come on. Jesus is going to come back. I'm going to close my eyes and you're going to be gone. It's going to be too late and it's going to be your fault. So come on, let's get this over with!

He told me that it's as simple as saying "Lord come into my life. I need you. Make me a new creation. I turn from my sins and turn to you. I want you to be my Lord and Savior." As I bowed my head and prayed, "Lord come into my life," I felt a hand on top of my head. I peeked to see if the hand belonged to Dick. It didn't. Dick had kept his hands to himself. Then I felt a cleansing throughout my body, a sensation beyond anything I had ever experienced. It felt like someone pouring warm, bubbly soda pop on my head as those years of drug abuse were washed away. In all my years of using drugs, I had never felt like anything like that. My eyes were opened for the first time and I ran out of the house filled with this spiritual high. Everything began to take on a new look.

I went over to Paul and Merle's house. They asked, "What happened to you? Your face is glowing!"

I said, "I met the real Jesus Christ. Let me share Him with you," and I told them about the Messiah.

When I walked into our bedroom that night, I found myself sitting on the bed saying "This is so exciting, Lord! You're real! What do you want me to do next?" Then I noticed the smell of pot in the room. It became so pervasively strong that I had to place a pillow over my face to block out the smell. I said, "All right, Lord! All right! I'll get rid of them." So I pulled the plants up and threw them out. I said, "I don't want this stuff anymore, God. I have you in my life."

Alison came home from work to find this radical druggie kid had just become a Jesus freak. She didn't understand what was going on." What are you doing, Terry?" she shouted. "You threw out our plants!" I told her how the pastor came by, and how I had prayed to receive Christ, and that my life was changed instantly. She started crying. "You're changing way too fast! What did you do?"

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I told her, "I've learned that Jesus Christ is alive and that there is a heaven. I've also learned that there is a hell, and if you don't accept Jesus, that is where you are going. Alison, you are going to accept Him right now. I love you and you are not going to hell!"

The movie Jesus of Nazareth had just come out and I got a book of pictures from the movie. I showed it to her and said, "Look, this is Jesus on the cross. This is what He did for us." After a while, Alison started crying, and she just wouldn't stop.

I told, "You are going to heaven. I don't care what you say. Talk to the preacher guy, because whether you like it or not, you are going to heaven!"

She finally agreed so the next day I called Dick Spangenberg again and said, "Can you drop by our house again? My wife's ready to listen to you." So he came over and he led her to Christ, too.

My life changed forever. Only two months later I found myself walking down the street, weeping, as I saw these little children. I asked, "Lord, who is going to tell these little kids about you?" Then I answered my own question. "Lord, here am I. Send me."

After I passed those kids, I walked through the door of this great big church that had a Bible school and said, "Where do I sign up?" Within two months of accepting Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior I knew God had called me to full-time ministry as a pastor.

To prepare myself for that, I bought the biggest family Bible I could get my hands on. I went over to my parents house and practically beat them senseless with God's Word. I did the same thing to them that I had done to Alison. I would say, "You will get saved!" and they'd reply, "No, we won't." Ever persistent, I said, "Yes, you will." I did a lot more damage than good that way. It took them ten years, but eventually, my parents did come to Christ. First, God had to undo the damage that I did in those early days by trying to drag them to the cross. By God's grace though, they eventually saw the light!

After a couple of years following Jesus, I started teaching a weekly Bible study at the maximum-security youth prison in Stockton, California. Normally, I wouldn't advise having a new Christian lead a Bible study, but nobody else wanted that job. I knew those messed up kids needed to hear God's Word, so I stepped in, even though I had no idea what I was doing. We started by going through the Book of Matthew, which I had never even read. I was Biblically illiterate but God still used me to teach His word!

I also started a Bible study in the apartment complex where we moved. I would stand up on a picnic table and yell, "Repent! The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. You need Jesus Christ." When people started coming around, I would blast them with the gospel. Someone came up one day and said, "Look, you're just a baby Christian. You'll settle down as you get older."

I thought, "Boy, I feel sorry for you. I don't want this feeling, this excitement, to ever die down. I want it to burn brighter each year as I follow Jesus."

Through the years, God worked many miracles in our lives. He healed Alison from the pain of her abortion. He healed me from my insane jealousy and streaks of violence. He freed us from drugs and alcohol. He also

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liberated me from the demonic, blasphemous music that I loved so much. Some of you may remember a famous Black Sabbath album which they mockingly titled "Born Again." On the cover was a picture of a baby demon with bright red skin, little horns and sharp, claw-like fingernails. Many years ago, I would have embraced such sacrilege, but now I know the truth. I know what it is to be born again because I have experienced it in my own life.

Terry Long

This testimony was transcribed - from a message given at Calvary Chapel of Salt Lake in 1994.

