

# A Change in Direction

*Many people look to Christianity with a skeptical eye. Some see the hypocrisy of the nominal Christian who acts as evil and deluded as the rest of the world. Others see the fervor of the yo-yo believer who repeatedly abandons his faith once the trial is done. And then there are those who have just been rubbed raw by judgmental religionist, spiritual hucksters and doctrinal bullies. I know how they feel, I was there too until God changed my direction.*

By Garry W. Johnson  
DISCOVERY FOR RECOVERY

*In mid 2005, I applied for a job with the inmate newspaper of Brushy Mountain Correctional Complex, Site 2 (Morgan County). I had been working as a laundry man in unit 14 for about six months, waiting on placement in the Building Trades class. At that time the Mountain Review was a two-man operation, and one of the editors was among the few people here I knew well. Roy Ridley had been re-classed to the annex and the Education Department was seeking his replacement. I submitted the following article as part of the interview process, and it was first published in December 2005. My placement at the inmate paper came the same day the vocational spot opened up.*

*For this inaugural issue of Discovery for Recovery, I thought it fitting to include as part of this new endeavor the article that began my last:*

Being new to news writing, I wanted my first article to be particularly outstanding. Not only would it be an introduction to BMCC as a whole, but it would also serve as a sample of work by which to judge my qualifications as a writer. Up to this point my writing experience has been limited to business letters and corny poems – save the long lost essays of high school. Consequently, I found the task before me somewhat daunting and questioned what I could write about that anyone would find entertaining.

Looking back over my last five years of incarceration, it occurred to me that what many inmates/convicts find most entertaining is each other. Gossip per-

meates our closed society, and the most hardened criminals seem transformed into little old ladies when the object of their scorn is mentioned. However, this writing is not about the evils of slander. It is simply to give the gossips a solid basis for their musing and everyone else a general knowledge of the new guy.

## In General

I was born Garry William Johnson, in the year 1970, in the city of Savannah, Georgia. My parents are Garry and Judy Johnson, and I have one sister, Misty Hurst. I grew up in the Savannah area and remained there until about the age of twenty-five. I then moved to Sevierville, Tennessee. I remained mostly in that area for a little less than five years before my arrest in September 2000. In early 2005, I pled guilty to two counts of Facilitation of First Degree Murder and one count of Aggravated Arson. I am currently serving two consecutive twenty-four-year sentences on the Facilitation charges. I also received a 20-year sentence for the Aggravated Arson, which is concurrent with my other judgments. I have been married twice and have one son, Joey, who was born in Savannah in 1994.

## Employment

During my life on the outside I worked predominately in sign manufacturing and residential construction. I have more than seven years experience in industrial screen-printing and about

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four in fabrications. I have also been self-employed as a residential painter. In the mid-90's I built a small business doing turnkey work for apartment complexes, residential painting, home renovations and custom interior graphics. I have worked several construction jobs from framing to finishing. Most of my life has been spent working with my hands.

## Education

In high school I took three classes in architectural drafting, and I have a working knowledge of blueprints. I attended school through the twelfth grade, but came a few credits short of graduating. Several years later, at the urging of my parents, I attained my GED but never attempted to further my education beyond that level.

I have spent several years working with computers – mostly in graphics and business applications. Nevertheless, I never developed any literary interest until these last few years. That interest came through improved reading skills, which were a gift from God.

## Yes, God

For the secular minded among us, this article is pretty well over. I thank you greatly for your interest, and I pray that each of you finds peace and happiness in your life.

## Goodbye to the Old Man

After my incarceration in September of 2000, I found myself sitting in a maximum-security cell in Sevierville, Tennessee. Like a rubber ball thrown into a concrete box, bouncing frantically from surface to surface, eventually you come to rest at the lowest point ... very still (Psalm 46:10).

I started to wonder exactly how I came to be here and what faults in my character had ultimately led to my demise. Looking back over my life, my general understandings had

seemed to be all right. Still, something was definitely wrong (Proverbs 14:12) – I mean, I could not get out of this box.

At an attorney visit one day I passed a guy in the hall who had worked for me in the past. He was locked up in a unit across from me, and later that night he sent me a Bible, via a guard (Romans 7:9-12). I thumbed through it now and then, reading a little bit here and there. I started questioning people about what they believed, and a myriad of responses came to me. People told me they were raised in such and such a church, or they married into such and such a religion. They would tell me, “We believe it’s all right to ...” or, “Scripture doesn’t mean you shouldn’t ...” After awhile it occurred to me that most people I had spoken to had chosen their beliefs based on one of two worldly considerations: personal affiliations and/or permissible sins (Matthew 7:13-14).

I was not a stranger to religion. I had been brought up going to church. Until junior high I had attended services regularly. I knew all the basic Bible stories and all the general concepts. I came away from my childhood indoctrinated, and I believed that I knew everything necessary to “get into heaven.” I mean, after all the preacher said it, so it must be right (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

So I began reflecting on my past, my religion and my understanding of God. I had heard all these ideas from those around me and compared them with my own. Then I considered all the nastiness in some of this world’s current “Christian” organizations. There seemed to be many conflicting ideas about what Christianity was all about and what I was supposed to be as a result. My childhood indoctrination had rightly taught me one thing, believe in Jesus. So what did Jesus have to say (John 14:6)?

I had remembered from Sunday school that the New Testament was the part of the Bible for this modern time. So I opened my Bible to Matthew and started reading. I did not

get far before I ran into red letters, where Jesus speaks. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus begins quoting Scripture, and He repeats the same phrase often: “It is written.” But where is it written? I was taught that this was the beginning of the book for me. By the twelfth chapter Jesus asks the Pharisees, “Have ye not read what David did ...?” Of course the Pharisees had – but I was not sure that I had (2 Timothy 3:16).

It was quite apparent early on that some reading was prerequisite if I were ever going to understand what Christ wanted me to know. After clearing my mind and resolving to put away my early teachings and the ideas of earthly men, I decided to read every word aloud from Genesis to Revelation.

It took me nine months to complete my first reading. During that time the God of the Bible revealed Himself to me. I spent thirty years of my life believing that I knew all about God. It turned out that I only knew man’s description of God. Christ admonishes us to become as little children, and as children we start out knowing nothing. Well meaning men have millions of concepts about God, but only through Scripture and the Holy Spirit does the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob speak (Matthew 11:25; 18:3; Luke 10:21; 18:17; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

Please do not misunderstand me, I am hardly suggesting that one complete reading of Scripture is going to alter your understanding of God – but it can. If you are willing to completely surrender your beliefs and trust God to teach you from His Word, through the Power of His Holy Spirit, if you will accept what the Bible really says and not allow men to explain away its literal meaning, if you will obey the unchanging God (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8) – then you will learn, like little children, how to become like your Heavenly Father, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ. May His peace be with you always. ✍