

Life brings us face to face with circumstances that look devastating, hopeless, impossibly broken. Yet, when we turn to God in those circumstances, He can and does bring hope, peace and beauty out of seemingly ruined lives. Meet a few of the people who have discovered that nothing they faced was too hard for God.

No Person Is Beyond Forgiveness

Eric Earhart

Eric Earhart was not your ordinary, small-town bully. At age 12, he began a life of vandalism, drinking and thievery, a pattern he embraced into adulthood. At a strapping 6 feet 5 inches tall, he was intimidating, and soon developed a reputation for drugs and fighting. Twice he was kicked out of the Army for his violent, drunken behavior. But more trouble ensued when Earhart began running drugs.

"My brother and I bought a refrigerated seafood truck, and we were running a 38-foot offshore fishing boat," says Earhart. "We began exploring the option of running drugs, trafficking drugs through the seafood business. Next thing you know, I am hauling Kilos of cocaine. But something deep and dark happened to me when I took that step. I crossed a line. I could just feel something come over me, and I could feel the hatred and anger just welling up inside of me."

The darkness inside Earhart only grew as time went on.

"There was a man who owed me just \$900.00. I beat him with a baseball bat first, and I told him to leave town, but he didn't," says Earhart. "It was an affront to me as a drug dealer and made me look bad to others; they began to believe my threats didn't mean anything. So I loaded a rifle and went to his home on Christmas Eve. I kicked in the door, shoved the gun in his mouth and I pulled the trigger—and it misfired. I said, 'God wanted you to live tonight.' And I didn't even know God."

Earhart began dating a woman who was working at a strip club. Her mother was a strong Christian.

Earhart recalls, "Her mother said to me, 'I don't know if you ever heard of the fact that Jesus Christ died for your sins and you can be forgiven.' And as I walked out of the house, it dawned on me: I had heard the truth—I was going to hell."

That was the seed that began to change Earhart. "I began trying to change my own life, to clean my life up," says Earhart. "I even began telling people I was going to give up the drug dealing."

Earhart decided to make one last drug run to New York. On the way back, local law enforcement had set up a roadblock.

"They were waiting for me to come back," he says. "After they arrested me, I was lying on the ground. It was about 4 a.m., there was a drizzling rain, the drug-sniffing dogs were barking at me, the guns were pointed at me, and I just looked up and said, 'Thank God it's over.'"

Earhart began to look to God to help him change while he waited for his trial. "I just cried out to God, and said, "I'm not asking You to get me out of trouble. I'm not asking You to keep me out of prison," he says. "I am afraid of becoming totally evil. I've ruined my life. If You can do something with my life that is good, if You can do something that has any value, take it please, and do something with it."

Earhart was convicted of two counts of trafficking, each conviction carrying a sentence of 42 months. "After I prayed, I had a complete sense of clarity and peace that I just needed to face this thing, and that God was going to be with me," Earhart says. "When I got to prison, I thought, *I'm not like these other people. I don't belong, I don't deserve to be here.* But God said to my heart, *No, you are one of these people, and you're no better than anyone else here. I love everybody the same.* From that point on, I began to tell everyone I could find about Jesus Christ."

From a prison volunteer, Earhart heard about an Assemblies of God church in Ahoskie, N.C., called Carpenter's Shop Church, led by Pastor Wallace Phillips, Earhart asked his dad to pick him up on Sunday mornings for his community visit passes to take him to church.

After meeting pastor Phillips, Earhart invited him to come visit him in prison. During those visits Phillips saw Earhart grow and change.

"I saw a life transformed and changed by God's power, and I saw the unique giftings that Eric could bring to the table," Phillips says. He invited Earhart to be the outreach minister at Carpenter's Shop immediately upon his release.

"Simultaneously, we were at a place where we were getting ready to plant a church," Added Phillips. He recognized in Earhart the potential to pastor.

"God was using Pastor Phillips to open a door of opportunity for me to fulfill what God called me to do," says Earhart, who now pastors Upper Room Assembly in Gatesville, N.C.

"Over the last four years we've seen the ministry grow to 125-150 people worshipping in a town of 280 people," Earhart says. "I love to tell people, "There isn't a person in this room who has committed more sins in their life than I've committed, has hurt more people than I've hurt, and done more evil than I've done. If God can save me and forgive me, and if He can heal me and make me a new person, then certainly He can do the same in your life." end.

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