



community success initiative

HELPING INDIVIDUALS & COMMUNITIES MOVE FROM WHERE THEY ARE TO WHERE THEY WANT TO BE

Daryl Atkinson's Reentry Story

On August 15, 1996, I began serving a prison term with the Alabama Department of Corrections for drug trafficking. Prior to that time, I lived a completely selfish life. I did exactly what I wanted to do, when I wanted to do it, and who I wanted to do it with. In hindsight, I thought my selfish behavior would bring me the happiness and peace that I so deeply desired but it only brought me misery and pain. I indulged in drugs, alcohol, and other risky behaviors to try and fill a void that I felt deep within. Nothing worked, no matter what I tried and believe me I tried a lot, I always ended up completely spiritually, mentally, and physically bankrupt.



During the first 18 months of my incarceration I was an incorrigible prisoner. Then one day I got into a fight with another inmate, which resulted in me being locked in solitary confinement for 45 days. During that time I stayed in isolation for 23 hours a day; therefore I had plenty of time to take a serious inventory of my life. I came to the conclusion that my life was a complete mess but I did not know how to change. Fortunately, during that time God revealed to me that I could trust Him to guide and direct my life.

Now you have to understand that putting my trust in God did not alleviate the immediate consequences of my behavior. As a result of the fight and other disciplinary infractions, the Alabama Department of Corrections moved me from a medium to maximum security institution. At the new prison, 60% of the inmate population had a sentence of life without parole.

As you can imagine the environment of the institution was filled with hopelessness and violence. However, there was a small group of brothers that were attempting to change the circumstances of their lives, both in and outside of prison. I immediately joined these brothers in their efforts, which is where I met James McConico, the man that introduced me to the law.

Shortly thereafter, I realized my calling was to use the law to advocate for people formerly incarcerated. When I was released from prison I began my quest by continuing my education. With the help of the Lord I have been able to obtain my Associate in Arts, Bachelor in Science, and Juris Doctor Degrees. I have passed the Bar exam in both Minnesota and North Carolina. Today I stand as an example of what people formerly incarcerated can achieve with the help of God and a wonderful support system.

“Reentry program for ex-offenders kicks off with jail-to-success story” article by the Daily Southerner,:

<http://dailysoutherner.com/local/x1210038376/Reentry-program-for-ex-offenders-kicks-off-with-jail-to-success-story>

View his video, speaking at the Second Chance Lobby Day Press conference:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBw_rFAUbNc&feature=related

[A Real Shawshank Redemption: One Man's Journey from Prison Bars to the Bar Exam](#)

[You can watch Daryl's acceptance speech for his White House Champions of Change award in June 2014.](#)

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