

TESTIFY

MAGAZINE

May 2026



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Newsweekly



Pastor Mike Gobel
My Personal Testimony

From A Prison Cell to a Disciple of Christ

From my book "Mending Hearts, Transforming Lives"

KEEPING JESUS BEFORE PEOPLE! www.gobigpublications.com

IN THIS EDITION

Issue 1
May 2026

FROM A PRISON CELL TO DISCIPLE OF CHRIST



It reminds me of something I read in one of Michael Cassidy's latest books called *'Deep Waters of the Disciple,'* in which he says: *"There was a time in my life when I believed that becoming a Christian meant enjoying a problem-free life. Come to Christ, I thought, that him as Saviour, and hey presto. Difficulties vanish; peace and ecstasy flood the soul; temptations are victoriously resisted; success crowns every effort; popularity, fame and fortune come tripping into one's life on*

the light fantastic; all is rosy. Finally, heaven is at the end of the road. It was a lovely vision – but a hopeless illusion" (Cassidy, 2022).¹

I believe this testimony will also highlight the significant responsibilities required by a new born again child of God but also the paradigm shift that I needed to make that eventually allowed for the Holy Spirit to lead and guide me on the path to reconciliation and redemption through Christ.

EDITORIAL

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TESTIFY MAGAZINE (TELLING PEOPLE'S STORIES - AFFIRMING GOD IS ALIVE!)

PASTOR MIKE GOBEL

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

My Personal Journey of 'Soul Transformation' through
Jesus Christ

Based on my book called "Mending Hearts, Transforming Lives"



MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

Introduction

My ultimate *purpose* in sharing my personal testimony with our readers and followers of Testify Magazine, or for that matter, being inspired to write my book, inspirational articles on a monthly basis, biblical teachings or in the development of many of the Christian programmes such as the restorative justice intervention I wrote called “The Honour Programme” is and will continue to be—part of my calling by God to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in and through the numerous trials and tribulations I have had to face in life.

Whether I’m preaching from a pulpit, lecturing/teaching a group of students or scholars or ministering to a group of offenders in the corridors of prison, my primary objective is not to honour the devil by concentrating on how bad I was prior coming to Christ, but to firstly offer the listener or reader the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour, and secondly, to learn from my mistakes how best to be guided to God’s Word on the fundamental principles of our faith as a child of God.

When we as spiritual leaders – whether teacher, preacher, prophet, Apostle, or evangelist, makes any part of our ministry, more or less important than to go and preach and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the world, then we have essentially missed the most important duty of our calling which is to lead God’s children to a life of repentance, obedience and devotion to Christ.

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

Secondly, but as important as our salvation, is guiding our fellow brethren through God's Word in having that 'personal relationship' with our Heavenly Father, through Christ Jesus our Lord and in communion and fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Built around these key fundamental biblical principles of our Christian faith comes the elements of doctrine, revelation, worship and Christian beliefs. Our salvation **MUST** be at the heart of our faith and trust in God. When we don't have a clear and defined understanding of our salvation through Christ, then everything else that follows becomes either mere 'head knowledge' or 'human interpretation' that will need to be questioned, analysed, assessed and in most cases re-taught.

This is because our salvation symbolises the 'rebirth of man' – from a sinful, corrupt natured human being in the "flesh" to a justified, reborn, 'spirit-filled' and restored human being - with the promise and commitment through the mercy and grace of our heavenly Father of 'eternal life' in and through Christ. We have in reality been reconciled back to the Father, restored through the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross, and walking under the guidance and fellowship of the Holy Spirit which is our inheritance as God's children.

Key verses include **Ephesians 2:18**, which states that through Jesus, we both have access to the Father, and **2 Corinthians 5:19**, noting God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ. Apostle Paul best described this 'spiritual state' in **1 Corinthians 13:12** in which it says, *"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."*

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In and through this verse Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of seeing in a mirror dimly to illustrate the ‘limitations of our current understanding of God’ and the world. He contrasts our imperfect knowledge with the clear, face-to-face knowledge that will be revealed in the future. This verse also serves as a reminder of the hope and a promise of a future time when we will fully understand and be known by God. It encourages believers to remain steadfast in their faith, trusting in God's plan and purpose for our lives despite the uncertainties of life. We must also understand that this path is more than just believing in God; it includes following Him *in* all aspects of our existence. *Following* a path of obedience and devotion doesn't come without its own obstacles and challenges, and as a result, I wanted to share with you my personal experiences and ongoing struggles that eventually led me down the path to redemption and ‘*soul transformation.*’

The battle for humanity's *soul* has raged on since the beginning of time (the Fall of Man), but thankfully Christ came just over two thousand years ago to cleanse us from sin and guilt, and He will return for His bride (the Church or body of Christ) – you better believe it!

This return will be sudden, the Bible describes the return of Christ as a literal, physical, and universally visible event, often depicted as coming “with the clouds” with power and great glory. It will be a dramatic, audible event-likened to lightning flashes, accompanied by a trumpet call— marking the end of the age, the resurrection of the dead, and the establishment of His kingdom.

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

Ironically, the hardships and obstacles I personally had to face in life, many of which was brought upon my path by my own stupidity, insecurities and disobedience which brought me literally and figuratively to my knees, enabled me to finally surrender my whole life to Christ. Although this tale is a long and tragic one, I do believe it is appropriate and necessary that I offer you a glimpse into aspects of my personal journey that finally led to my 'soul transformation' without trying to give the devil the glory for any of the sinful and immoral aspects of my previous life.

It reminds me of something I read in one of Michael Cassidy's latest books called *'Deep Waters of the Disciple,'* in which he says: *"There was a time in my life when I believed that becoming a Christian meant enjoying a problem-free life. Come to Christ, I thought, that him as Saviour, and hey presto. Difficulties vanish; peace and ecstasy flood the soul; temptations are victoriously resisted; success crowns every effort; popularity, fame and fortune come tripping into one's life on the light fantastic; all is rosy. Finally, heaven is at the end of the road. It was a lovely vision – but a hopeless illusion"* (Cassidy, 2022)¹

I believe this testimony will also highlight the significant responsibilities required by a new born again child of God but also the paradigm shift that I needed to make that eventually allowed for the Holy Spirit to lead and guide me on the path to reconciliation and redemption through Christ.

1. Cassidy, M. (2022). *Deep Waters of the Disciple*. Oasis International Ltd.

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

This reflection is the result of a deep sense of conviction and self-examination, formed and shaped by years of trial and error, as well as the contributions of a multitude of ordinary people and spiritual leaders who have played a significant role in my growth and maturity as a child of God. This transformation was also assisted by my own personal experiences I have come to witness in the ministry of evangelism, teaching and preaching the message of the Gospel and the Great Commission to both the saved and the unsaved.

For the Word of God is clear, as it says in **Psalm 149:4-5 (NKJV)**: *“For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation. Let the saints be joyful in glory; Let them sing aloud on their beds.”*

The Seed of Transformation

I grew up in the heart of Cape Town. At just four years old, I lost my father in a tragic motor car accident near Gordon’s Bay in 1967. This event marked the beginning of a life focused more on childhood survival rather than on childlike dreams and joyful innocence.

To provide for our daily needs while working as a nurse at Groote Schuur Hospital, my beloved ‘late’ mother placed me in boarding school from the age of nine. I spent most of my primary school years in the beautiful, picturesque little town of Montagu in the “Klein (Small) Karoo” before attending Groote Schuur Hoër (High) School in Newlands, Cape Town.

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After matriculating, I was called up for 'compulsory' military service in the South African Defence Force. Due to my father's untimely death, we were not affluent, but I learned to appreciate the little that we had. From the age of sixteen, I worked some nights and weekends, cleaning floors and waiting tables in various establishments in Rondebosch and Sea Point (i.e. Pig 'n Whistle, Nauty's Moonlight Grill, Peter's Pancake Place, and Peckers Restaurant). This exposure to the night life of Cape Town at such an early age in my life also contributed to the fast process maturity that wasn't always a good thing.

In terms of my personal upbringing, I grew up without *fatherly* discipline and received very little motherly love or parental guidance as was necessary and to some degree even missed. Discipline was always in the mix, but it was never measured by an equal amount of motherly or parental love that I so desperately needed.

Thankfully corporal punishment was common in schools and homes back then – which was a good thing, unlike today! Naturally, when I misbehaved or got into serious trouble at school or at home, I would often receive severe punishment from either the principal or my mother or both most of the time.

I recall nights spent outside in the cold, without food or a warm bed to sleep on, but nevertheless these were lessons of discipline that I am proud of today - just a pity I never took them seriously back in those days when they might have mattered the most. As a result, upon leaving the military, I was determined to prove to the world, my mother in particular and too myself I guess, that I was a real man capable of fending for myself.

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

Unbeknown to me, these transitional years from formative development to adolescence began shaping my character, nature, and personality, contrasting with the innocence of a child and sprouting new and exciting adventures that mostly involved worldly pleasures that invariably involved girls, partying, surfing, art and music.

I refer to this period in my book as living in my “*default mode*,” representing our *sinful nature* that was attracted to worldly desires and pleasures over God's values and principles. The harsh reality of living from hand to mouth and the negative influences I grew accustomed too, began shaping my character according to worldly norms which guided my wrongful actions and behaviour towards a life of pleasure and ungodliness. It wasn't something I consciously chose; I simply grow into that worldly lifestyle over time.

Over the years, I wrongfully and regrettably connected with people who I believed could help me achieve success as I was climbing the proverbial ‘corporate ladder.’ This led to involvement in devious business ventures associated to corporate investments, and particularly in the illegal trade of uncut diamonds. Despite its glamorous appearance, such a life is fraught with hidden agendas, unlawful behaviour, moral compromises and shady characters.

In 1994, at the age of 31, I made a decision that would change my life forever. I unjustifiably involved myself in unlawful investments that included the trade in rough diamonds, eventually committing a crime of fraud. For years, it seemed I had gotten away with it as the victim and authorities had done nothing to pursue this case from a legal standpoint.

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

But in 2007, exactly 13 years later, the State took on the case and I was arrested at my then Sandton home and escorted under high security first to Goodwood Prison in Cape Town to stand trial for the crime of fraud I had committed over 13 years earlier. By then I was a very wealthy man through the illegal trade in mainly rough diamonds that I was smuggling out of the country and selling to the international markets in Antwerp, Tokyo, London, New York, and Tel Aviv.

After arriving in Cape Town I appeared before a magistrate the next day to be informed of the charges against me. I was placed in Die Gat ('The Hole') in the basement at the bottom of the Bellville Magistrates Court—awaiting trial cells controlled by the South African Police Services or maybe it is the 'prison gangs' – I'm not entirely sure. It certainly felt like the gangsters had more control over the place than the authorities did. Based on what I had experienced, these cells housed hundreds of offenders and awaiting trial prisoners from all over the Western Cape.

The cells were dark and dangerous, filled with hardened criminals, many returning to court for multiple offenses. As a non-affiliated, first-time offender, known as a "Frans" in prison, I had no Number (this is a Number which separates you from being either a member of the 26, 27, or 28 prison gangs), meaning I had no 'prison voice' or affiliation, no prison identity or authority amongst the offenders, and no power to demand anything, not even control over where you lay your head to sleep at night.

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As a result, I had to defend myself against the inevitable daily threats of violence, shake downs (that's when gang members – usually from the 26's would come and take your personal belongings and share it amongst themselves), and the potentially more serious life-threatening attacks from fellow offenders and gangsters if you don't comply with their demands—which in some cases ends up you getting raped and used as a 'slave' for the pleasure of usually a General in the Number Gang.

The cries of those men, many young and old gave me nightmares and haunted me for many, many years after leaving prison. If it wasn't for God who cleansed my soul of these evil atrocities I had to witness, I would probably be sitting in a mental hospital or I would have taken my own life— which is something I had sadly witness several times in prison.

Lying on that cold cement floor, unable to distinguish my own blood from my tears, I realized for the first time how much I had messed up. I was far from the confident corporate executive who once stood with pride and dignity before industry leaders and government officials closing multimillion-dollar deals and who could command the respect of these corporate executives around the world. I had become a person I personally despised, even hated you could say, totally foreign in nature and character to the once innocent child who had accepted Jesus as his personal Lord and Saviour at the tender age of sixteen and who would give the shirt off his back for someone who was suffering.

Yet, somehow, I had found comfort and happiness in this '*false elusion*' because I thought that such a lifestyle would bring me closer to my worldly desire for fortune and fame.

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

Irrespective of how shallow and false that elusion was. I felt ashamed to call myself a Christian, despite having once given my heart to the Lord. I had spent the previous 15 years of my life posing as what I would call a “freelance” (false) Christian, rarely, if ever demonstrating the *image* of Christ, yet using the title of ‘Christian’ to impress my affiliation to a religion I knew little about and to portray myself as a so called ‘good person’ by mere association to something that represented godliness and holiness.

The day I was attacked by 17 hardened gangsters who stole everything I had brought with me into prison, except for my Bible, which I had taken with me to court that day. In prison, nothing is safe, not even your Bible, as many will use its pages to roll marijuana (‘dagga’) cigarettes and heaven knows what else.

As I stared down onto the pages of my Bible which fell open to Hebrews 10, I began to read from verse 34-36 which reads as follows, “*You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence [and hope]; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised*” (Nelson, 2007) ²

2. Nelson, T. (2007). *The Wiersbe Study Bible (NKJV)*.

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

It was as if God had called me out by name. His glorious *presence* filled the cell with a glow of His 'divine' Glory that was so *bright* I was unable to open my eyes. I knew I was in the 'presence of God' as I felt the warm glow of God's unconditional love surround me as I sat on my knees asking God for His mercy and grace, confessing every known sin in the corridors of guilt and shame in my heart and mind. Pleading for Him to refill my heart with the presence of the Holy Spirit that would guide and protect me through my trials and tribulations ahead.

The next minute I could feel the heavy weight of guilt lift off my shoulders. I somehow knew I was being '*reborn*' (being 'transformed' mind, body and spirit) from the inside out. Despite the 'justifiable' consequence of my unlawful actions and behaviour, I realized I would no longer have to walk this road alone. God's presence of hope and redemptive peace and unconditional love gave me the silent strength to face the pain and suffering I knew I would *still* have to endure with courage and perseverance.

What was important was that I accepted my punishment and persecution, not only because I deserved it but because I knew that Jesus Christ had paid an unimaginable price for my sins and therefore, I knew that no amount of punishment would have been enough, not only for my crimes but for the sins that I had committed throughout my life.

I made God a promise that day, when He supernaturally '*mended my broken heart and transformed my life*' that if I would survive this period of isolation, I would dedicate the rest of my life to serving Him in spirit and in truth as His disciple.

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

References

Clinton, J. Roberts, THE MAKING OF A LEADER, Colorado Springs, CO, NavPress. 1988

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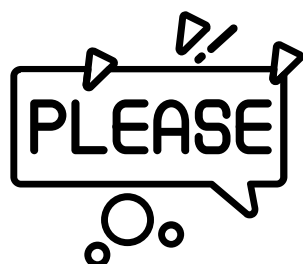
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Psalm 1 vers 3 sê :

*“En hy sal wees soos 'n boom wat
geplant is by waterstrome, wat sy vrugte gee
op sy tyd en waarvan die blare nie verwelk nie;
en alles wat hy doen, voer hy voorspoedig uit.”*



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THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS!

HAVE YOU ACCEPTED JESUS
CHRIST?

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Romans 3:23 ESV

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

The abovementioned verse is an extremely well used verse and many people know it and can even quote it off by heart, but the significance of it is the reality that every single person needs to contemplate.

If you have not accepted Jesus as your Personal Saviour yet or are thin king about it, you have to start here. The reality of your sin problem cancels and disqualifies you from the very presence of God and this bars you from eternal Life. Your choices are simple here, either an eternity with God or an Eternity without God. I would think that the logical answer would be an Eternity with God. Why? Well let's look at this:

2 Thessalonians 1:9

"They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might"

NASB

This is the reality of a choice that omits Jesus as your Personal Saviour -

- = **Everlasting Punishment**
- = **Destruction**
- = **Shut Out**
- = **No Godly Presence**
- = **And no Glory at all**

This is not something to take lightly and by the way this is not scaring you into making a false decision, God is love, thus we as His followers are love, this means if I say I have the love of God, it is my duty to tell you the truth and point you into the right direction.

So in looking at the sin problem and the reality of this, what is the answer then? Let's look at this:

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

NASB

What a wonderful solution to an immense problem, God has made a way and in making the way He has also made it very clear that this is the only answer to the problem. You have to accept Jesus His Son in order to obtain Eternal Life and ward off all the destruction and other bad things spoken about in the previous Bible verse.

It also makes it very clear that this can only be done through JESUS CHRIST His Son, there is no other way to salvation or Eternal life other than through Jesus, NONE!

Let's look at this too:

John 1:12-13

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

NASB

Wow! Just look at this, not only do we get Eternal Life but we become Children of God. The impact of this is massive as it speaks to the fact that we now belong to the family of God and receive the benefits of being part of a family, and not just any family but a royal family (1 Peter 2 vs 9).

So in looking and understanding all of this, How do you accept Jesus as your Personal Saviour?

Romans 10 vs 9-10

"that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

NASB

Let me just make one point very clear before we look at the above verses, your salvation cannot be obtained by good works, you cannot go to Heaven or be part of God's family because you are a good person, or you do good deeds, No! The Bible makes it clear, if you want to accept Jesus as your Personal Saviour then it gets done on the basis of two things. These two things are critical because it will also help you on your work with the Lord and attain righteousness and a life pleasing to God.

Firstly, you have to confess with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord, this is very important because by your confession God will know and people in the world will know. This is significant because one does not hide a light under a bowl. Everyone must see and hear that you are a child of God.

BELIEF

And secondly you must believe in your heart, with your whole being and understanding that Jesus was raised from the dead and is alive and is your only Saviour.

So if you have read all of this and the Holy Spirit is directing you to accept Jesus as your Personal Saviour please pray the prayer on the next page, God loves you so much.



ACCEPTING JESUS IS EVERYTHING!

PRAYER FOR SALVATION

Dear Lord Jesus,

I understand that I am a sinner and in need of desperate saving, The Bible tells me clearly that the only answer is for me to confess with my mouth and believe in my heart. I am now confessing with my mouth that I am accepting You as my Personal Saviour and believing in my heart that you are alive and well and dwelling within me. Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of other Believers and allow me please to follow in your footsteps. Amen!

Wow! Congratulations if you have just prayed this prayer, and know that you are now part of the family of the Kingdom of God. Please tell someone about your decision, pray all the time and read and study your Bible. Find a Holy Ghost, Bible preaching church and join.

Please let us know if you have made this decision and allow us to point you in the right direction.

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