

Testimony

by Tom Papanyas

Tom Papania's testimony recounts his journey from a life of crime and violence to one of faith and redemption through God's grace.

Duration: 1:04:34

Scripture: Luke 23:39, John 3:16, Acts 16:31, Romans 8:31

Topics: "Testimony"

Description

In this video, Dr. James Dobson and Mike Trot share the powerful testimony of Tom Bopania, a man whose life was filled with lies, manipulation, and even murder. Despite his destructive path, God intervened and transformed Tom's life with His mercy and grace. Tom shares how he was arrested and spent five and a half years in jail, questioning what he had done wrong. However, he later discovered that it was a test by a group of men who wanted to see how he would handle pressure. After passing the test, Tom was welcomed into their family. He then shares how he was sent back to New York to carry out a mission but felt like he had failed. However, the men who sent him knew he was out and called him back to the same storefront where it all began. Tom shares how he always carried a gun, even after getting out of jail, but reluctantly agreed to leave it on a table when he arrived. He emphasizes that if God can transform someone like him, He can do it for anyone. Tom concludes his testimony by proclaiming that God reached into the depths of hell and plucked him out, washing him with the blood of Jesus Christ, and sending him to preach the gospel.

Transcript

The following was originally produced for the international radio series Focus on the Family, featuring psychologist and popular author Dr. James Dobson. In this cassette, Dr. Dobson and co-host Mike Trapp present an extraordinary message of a changed life for Mr. Tom Papania. This is an account of one man's determination of living life his way, which included lying, manipulation, and even murder.

And in spite of this, his story also includes the Lord's merciful intervention. God reached out to a man whose life was bent on destruction and transformed it to a life of hope, peace, and grace. Let's now get things underway with your host, Dr. James Dobson.

Well, Mike, every now and then we come across a personal testimony here at Focus on the Family that is absolutely riveting in its retelling. And that's occurred six, eight, ten times in the 19-year history of this ministry, going back to 1977. And we're about to hear a story today that is just breathtaking in its context.

It's the personal experience of Mr. Tom Papania, who worked his way up in the leadership of a mafia gang. And it's one of those messages that ought to be heard on tape. People should have this in their library, and especially you should give it to your non-Christian friends, because I really believe God will bless it.

Tom comes out of Georgia. He's the president of a ministry in Powder Springs, Georgia, God's Saving Grace Ministries. He's an evangelist, and he travels and speaks.

And I agree with you, people will be mesmerized by this story. Let's don't tell them anymore, okay? They can listen for themselves. I was raised in a household that there wasn't much love there.

My mother and father were married at 13 years old in Sicily. They came to America. My father had no education.

He would take any job that was available. He worked usually two jobs, sometimes three jobs. When he would come home from work, he would begin drinking and just go to sleep.

My father never did the things with me that most fathers do with their sons. He never took me to a ballgame. He never took me fishing.

He never even put his arms around me. I never even heard him call me son. The only attention I ever got from him is when I did something that he didn't like.

He would take me into my room, and he had this big leather strap. In those days, they used to use it to sharpen straight-edge razors. It was a double-sided wide leather strap, and he'd take me in the room, and he would hit me with that.

And at the least little thing wrong, if something went wrong in the job, if something was wrong between him and my mother, he would take me in the room. He would take everything out on me. And I realized at about nine or ten years old that as soon as I started crying, he would stop hitting me and just walk out of the room.

He wouldn't say a word. He would just leave, and that was it. And I made a commitment to myself at that age that if my father wasn't going to show me love, I was never going to allow him to see any more of my tears.

And in the beginning, when he used to come into the room and hit me with the strap, it was very hard for me to hold those tears back. He was a big man. He was a strong man, and that was a big belt.

But I held it back, and then as time went by, my heart just became so callous, I believe, by the time I was a teenager, I didn't have any tears left to shed. And I would intentionally get him upset, so he would bring me in the room and hit me with the strap, and I would just look at him, and I would laugh, and he would just walk out of the room. When I was about 15 years old, I was coming home from school one day, and by the railroad tracks, I saw a gun on the ground.

It was an old gun. It was rusty. It had no bullets in it.

And I picked it up, and when I got together with my friends later on, I came up with this idea. There were these old Italian men that used to stay in this storefront, and they always had a lot of money. They were dressed very well.

And I came up with the idea that if we covered our faces, we could go in there with this gun and hold them up and get all their money. And then we could take the money, and we could all go to Coney Island and go on all the rides and get the cotton candy and the hot dogs. At first, they didn't want to do it, but I convinced them to do it, that they wouldn't know who we were, and we went in there.

And we went in the storefront, and there was about 30 or more men in there. And I took the gun out and told everybody I wanted their money, and they put all their money on the table. And I came up with even a better idea.

I realized that there was only three of us and over 30 of them, and when we left, they would probably chase us. So I made each one of them take their pants off. And not only got their money, I got their respect, their dignity.

And when we left, about two blocks later, we threw the pants down, took the money, and went to Coney Island. We were very nervous the first time we did it, but it went by so easy. We came back three more times in the course of about four or five months.

One night, I was at home having dinner with my mother and father, and there was a knock on the door. My father opened the door, and there was three men standing there, all dressed in black, and these weren't the three wise men at the door. And they began speaking in Sicilian, and I heard them say to my father, we need to come in and speak to you and your son.

It's very important. And my father answered back in Sicilian, I told you men never to come near my family or never to come near my house, and I want you to leave right now. And one of the men said, if we leave right now, you won't have a son in the morning.

We said this is important. And my father told my mother to go into the bedroom, and the men came in, sat down, and one of them pointed a finger right in my face, and he said, we know it's you that has the gun and has come in there and has taken our money and our parents. But the only thing that's keeping you alive is the respect that we have for your grandfather.

And I didn't understand that because my grandfather had died before I was even born. My mother and father never even spoke of him. I didn't even know his name.

And here these men are telling me that I'm alive because of the respect they have for a dead person. And this man went on to say that if you do it again, even the respect we have for your grandfather won't save you. And they just got up and they just left.

My father took me in the room and probably gave me the worst beating I ever got. I still didn't cry. And I asked him, I said, who is my grandfather? He's dead and these men still have respect for him.

Who is he? And my father told me never to ask about my grandfather. And if I was ever to go by these men again, he said, I won't hit you. He said, I'll kill you.

Stay away from these men. But I was very thick headed. The next day when I came back from school, I went right into that storefront.

Those men were there. And I just sat down and I said, I demand to know who my grandfather is if you're keeping me alive because of him. And one man said to me, you know, your father is a very foolish man.

And I said, I didn't come here to hear about my father. I hate my father. I said, one of these days I'll kill my father.

I said, I want to know about my grandfather. And this man told me that my grandfather was Joe Mazzaria, known as Joe the boss. And the FBI claims that he's the one responsible in the 1900s for bringing the mafia over from Sicily.

They told me that he was the boss of all the bosses in New York. And Lucky Luciano had killed him in order to become boss and that my father could have been a very, very powerful and wealthy man in New York. But my father wanted no part of them.

They said, your father doesn't have to work two and three jobs. You don't have to live like you're living. And that's why we're saying your father is very foolish.

And I started thinking and I said to this man and this man with Gambino. I said, well, I'm my father's only son. And if he doesn't want this position, then I can have it.

Right. And he said, yes. And I said, OK, I'll take it.

And he said, no, not at 15 years old. You won't. There's a lot of things that your father should have been teaching you that we'll have to teach you.

And I wanted to be in this thing called a mafia for one reason only. I wanted to hurt my father the way he had hurt me by not showing me love, the rejection that he had shown me, because the mafia didn't impress me because at 15 years old, four times I took all their money and their pants. They didn't really impress me as gangsters.

But I finally found a way that I can get even with my father. If he'd rather work all these jobs and drink himself to almost death rather than get involved with them, I found a way to hurt him. And they started teaching me the things that my father never taught me.

They taught me how to make money without working, making money off of people that did work, stealing and different things, con games. And I was making a few hundred dollars a week and I was doing very good. When I was 17 years old, they came to me and they gave me a gun.

This time it wasn't an old gun. It wasn't rusty. And this time it had bullets in it.

And I took a vow that I would live and die by that gun. A piece of paper was put in my hand. It was set on fire and it said, if I betray the mafia, I burn like this paper is burning and go to hell.

I couldn't wait to go home after I got that gun. I knew my mother was a typical Italian mother. When she wasn't in the kitchen cooking, she was in the bedroom playing with the rosary beads.

And I knew my father would be working and I rushed home and sure enough, my mother was in the bedroom and I walked in and she was on her knees playing. And I interrupted her and asked her what she was praying about. And she said, I'm praying for this family and for you.

And I said, what are you praying about for me? And she looked up at me and tears were just started to come down her eyes. And she said, it's no secret that you're involved with these men. She said, but what you don't know is these men are the men that killed my father.

And she said, you have no idea what it was like for my every day. My father left the house, never knowing if he was coming back. And one day the police came to the house and told us he was killed.

He wasn't coming back. And she said, these men killed my father and I don't want them killing my son. So she said, I'm praying that you will seek God for your protection.

And that's just the answer I wanted her to say. And I, I pulled the gun out and I said, here's my protection. I can't see this Jesus that you're always praying to.

And I don't know if he'll be there when I'm in trouble, but I know this gun will be with me 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And I know how to use it. I'm not afraid to use it.

So don't pray that prayer for me anymore. She just continued crying. I said, is there anything else you're praying for me? And she looked up at me and said, yes, I'm praying that someday you'll become a priest.

And that's very funny when you're waving a 45, I just thought the offerings I could have gotten church if I was a priest waving a 45. And I looked at her and I said, that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard you say. I said, mom, I've never once knew why I was brought into this world.

And now I know I said, my father wouldn't take that rightful position that this family should have. So God allowed me to come into the world to step into my grandfather's shoes. And I said, I'm going to be better than my grandfather.

I'm going to be more violent, more wealthy, more powerful. I said, so you don't ever have to pray for me ever again. And tears were still coming down her eyes.

She looked up at me and she said, not the Bible for you, not you can ever make me stop praying. And she said, I won't stop praying until God answers those prayers. It wasn't long before that I was called to use the gun.

They called me in and they said, Tom, you've been doing very good and you're making a lot of money for yourself. You're making a lot of money for us. And I was always big and strong and knew how to take care of myself.

I was, I was a fighter and they used to send me out to collect money. I was 17 and 18 years old. And then they would send me out to grown men to collect money that I owed.

And I always came back with every penny. I was very proud of it. If I had to beat them up with a baseball bat or stabbed them with an ice pick, whatever I had to do short of killing them, I would do to bring the money back.

And I was very proud of this. I was growing in the mafia. I was getting a reputation.

And they said, now it's the next step. Some men have hijacked a truck in the garment district. It was an inside job.

We killed a man on the inside that's taken care of. But the two men that hijacked the truck, they're hiding out in Kansas. We want you to go there and I want you to shoot both of these men.

We don't want you to kill them. We just want you to set an example for everybody to see what happens if they should steal from us. And they said, we don't want you using your right name.

So we have identification for you. Here's the plane ticket. Just go there.

As soon as you get off the plane, somebody knows who you are. They'll come to you. They'll give you the keys to a car and they'll give you a gun and they'll give you pictures of the two men that we want you to shoot.

And they'll tell you exactly where they are. Just go there, shoot the two men and come right back. Everything that they told me was exactly the way they told me.

When I got there, a man met me. He gave me the keys. He gave me a gun.

He gave me pictures, gave me directions. I went there. I shot the two men.

I came back to the airport, kept looking in the rearview mirrors. Nobody was following me. I made a few extra turns, felt very safe, got back to the airport, waited till they were boarding the plane.

And I got on the plane and all that was on the plane was policemen. And as soon as I boarded the plane, they said my name, they put handcuffs on me, told me I was under arrest for shooting two men. And they even knew the names of the two men.

I don't even know their names. I only had their picture. Brought me before a judge and the judge said, you know, you're Italian.

You're from New York and you're down here shooting people. Are you in the mafia? Is this a contract? And I had taken a vow of silence at 17 years old and I didn't even answer the judge. And he said, if you're going to be quiet like this when you come before me for the trial, he said, I'll send you away for the maximum time that I can.

When it came time for me to go before the judge, I still kept that vow of silence. I didn't say a word. He sentenced me to two five to 10 year sentences in the Kansas State Penitentiary.

I went there and that time it was probably the worst and toughest prison in the United States. As big as I was and as tough as I was handling myself, I had to fight almost every other day for survival in that place. My mother and father had found out that I was arrested and put in jail for shooting somebody.

And my father disowned me. He said, I didn't have a mother. I didn't have a father and not to write any letters, not to make any phone calls, that they didn't exist anymore, that I had chosen a new family.

And my father wrote to me to tell me that I'd broken my mother's heart and never wanted me to speak to my mother again. Five and a half years went by. I finished the first sentence.

I was paroled for the second sentence and sent back to New York. When I got back to New York, I didn't want to go see those men right away. I thought I had failed them.

They told me to go shoot two men and come back right away. I shot the two men, but it took me five and a half years to get back. And I really believed that I had failed them.

But they knew that I was out and very shortly they sent for me to that same storefront where everything started. When I went there, I had a gun. I always walked around with a gun.

The day that I got out of jail, I got a gun. As soon as I walked in, a man came up to me and he said, Tom, do you have a gun on you? And I said, of course I do. He said, well, can we have it? I said, no.

And there was a table close by. I said, well, I'll put the gun on the table. And they said it was all right.

I wanted that gun as close to me as possible. So if these men were going to kill me, then I can get the gun and kill as many of them as I could before they kill me. And I sat down and the first question I was asked was, how was prison? And I was very cocky and arrogant.

I said, look, I don't have any scars, no broken bones or anything. I said, I handled myself. I survived.

And then he leaned back and he said, is there any one thing that you had thought about all the time that you were in prison? And that was very easy for me to answer, because the day that I was arrested until the day that I was released five and a half years later, I wondered what I did wrong, how I messed up that I was caught. And this is what I told him. And he looked at me and he said, well, now you're going to understand why we wanted your gun.

And he said, you may not understand this right away, but in time you will. He said, we gave the police your name and we told them everything. He said, everything that we've asked you to do so far, you've been very loyal, you've done it, but we didn't know what would happen under pressure.

We didn't know if you had to go to jail, how you would hold up. So we had to give you a test. And he said, you passed our test and got up and opened up his arms and said, welcome to our family, son.

First man that ever called me son that sent me to jail for five and a half years, broke my mother's heart. And he's got his arms open with a smile, calling me son. All I could think of was that gun on the table, killing him and everybody in that room.

But before I had a chance to reach for the gun, there was a book on his table and he opened up the book. And I had seen that book many times before. This was the book where they lent people money and the amounts and all the interests were in there.

And he turned to me and he said, Tom, he said, if you can have any business that you'd want, any at all, which would you choose? And he knew I always liked the nightclub and discotheque business. And I told him that and he turned the book around and he said, pick one. You know, it's amazing how fast the rage and anger disappeared, how quick I forgot about my mother's broken heart, how quick I forgot about those five and a half years in prison.

I was going to be a nightclub owner now. Now I had a smile on my face and I looked at the book and there was two of them there that I really liked that I knew were very good clubs. And I asked him if I can have some time to think it over because I couldn't make a decision right now.

And he said, no problem. Take both of them. You deserve it.

This was the beginning of my business life in the mafia from two nightclubs. I eventually went to six restaurants and by the time I was 30 years old, I was involved in the longshoreman business, the trucking business, the warehouse business, every fruit and vegetable, every piece of meat, every fish that came

into the ports and the different places in New York City, I was getting a kickback from. I was now making hundreds of thousands of dollars, not just hundreds anymore, but hundreds of thousands of dollars.

I was growing. And there came a time again, a few years later, that I would go back to jail. This time, a man came into one of my restaurants and he was, he stole a lot of stocks and that's, he would work with stocks and bonds.

And he just did a deal for four and a half million dollars. And he came into the restaurant with a suitcase full of four and a half million dollars and asked me if I would hold it for him for a month or two because the people he was dealing with were new. He didn't know them.

He didn't trust them. And he said, I've given them the stocks and they've given me the money. Now they can just come to my house and kill me and get the money back.

He said, so if you just hold the money for me for a while. And I put it in the safe of the restaurant. The next day, the FBI came in and unknown to him, he was working with undercover agents.

And the money was mocked and everything. And they arrested me. And I went before the judge and the judge knew me.

I had been before him dozens of times before on different assault charges and extortion charges. And he said, Tom, we know you had nothing to do with the stocks and bonds, the theft of it or the sale of it. We know this man just brought them to your restaurant for you to hold.

And he said, if you'll just testify to that, you can walk out of the courtroom. And I told the judge, I said, you know me better than that. I said, what's the maximum I can get? He said, well, it's a conspiracy charge.

The maximum that I can give you is two years. I said, give me the two years so I can go ahead and get it over with. He gave me the two years and this time was much different.

By this time, the American Civil Liberties Union had stuck their noses into the prisons and turned them into college campuses. It was no more of the turn of the crime and it was no longer a penitentiary or a prison. Now it was a correctional institution.

And they sent me to Petersburg, Virginia for my two years. And when I got there, the red carpet was rolled out. I had my own private room.

I had my own stereo, my own refrigerator, my own ice machine. I had all the things that I had at home. They told me the one thing that I had to do was work because everybody at this jail had to work.

So I had a job from 1130 in the morning to 1145 in the morning. They gave me a broom and I swept the basketball court. After that, I'd go out and get some suntan lotion and lay out in the sun and work on my tan.

And the time that I was in there, I used to go to church on Saturday. A Catholic priest used to come in on Saturday and hold services. And the only reason I went to church on Saturday, he used to bring a bunch of girls in with him and I'd go over there just checking out the girls.

And one day he came in and he walked up to me and I only had about four or five months left to do to finish my sentence. And he said, you know, Tom, I've been in jails and I've seen many people. He said,

but you're different than other people.

And I looked at him and laughed. I said, of course I'm different. I said, I'm the third highest in the Gambino family.

I'm much different than the people here. And he said, no, I'm not talking about that. He said, what are you planning on doing when you get out in the next few months? And I looked at him and I said, I've got a few hundred people working for me.

I've got about 40 businesses I'm controlling. I've got millions of dollars. I said, what do you think I'm doing when I get out? It's business as usual.

I eventually got out. I went back to New York and it was business as usual. Every penny that was due me was given to me.

All the businesses were taken care of while I was gone. It was like I went on vacation and just came back. Nothing had changed.

But there was something deep inside me all those years as I was getting power, as I was getting wealth and buying all the material things that anybody could dream of, there was always a void in my life. There was always something missing and I would go out and buy something and it would satisfy me maybe 24 hours, maybe 48 hours. But then that void would come back.

So when I got back to New York, I said, well, maybe I need to get out of New York for a while. The police know me here. I'm under surveillance 24 hours.

My phones are bugged and every time I drive someplace, I've got a whole parade behind me following me. Maybe it's freedom that I don't have. And I spoke to my boss.

Carlo Gambino had died of natural causes in 1976 and Paul Castellano had taken over his brother-in-law. When I was first initiated into the Mafia, I had conditions. I told Carlo Gambino that I would not become a member of the Mafia unless I answered directly to him.

I didn't want to answer to anybody else. I didn't want to be anybody's gopher. I didn't want to be anybody's puppet.

And he agreed to this and before he died, he asked Paul Castellano to make the same agreement with me that I would work directly for him. Any money I made, I would turn in directly to them and then they would take what they wanted. I didn't give anybody else money.

And Carlo Gambino had died. Paul Castellano took over and everything was just the same. So I told Paul, I said, Paul, I said, I want to get out of New York for a while.

I want to check out California, Arizona, and maybe Florida. I like the warm weather. I wanted to go where it was warm.

And he said, go ahead because no matter where I went, I would still have that position. I would still have that power. In fact, everything I had in New York would still be mine and wherever I went, that would just add to whatever I had.

And I went to these places and stayed a few days. Some places I stayed up to a month, but I didn't like them. I always wound up coming back to New York and staying there.

At the time, they had me overseeing a lot of the construction work in Atlantic City, New Jersey. All the construction was going on, the casinos, hotels and restaurants. And we had total control of all the unions over there.

And if anybody wanted to build anything, they had to pay us under the table. And this way, once they paid us, the union workers would be on the job. The materials would be on the job and they'd have no problems.

If they didn't pay us, nothing would happen and they would lose hundreds, if not millions of dollars by not meeting the construction schedule. So I was over there overseeing this and a man from Florida called me up. And he said, Tom, I have a friend in Atlanta, Georgia that has a couple of restaurants and he's interested in opening one in Atlantic City.

And he's a good friend of mine. He said, can you give him a break? He's a real good friend. And I said, well, tell him to come up and we'll talk and I'll see what I can do.

And the man came from Atlanta, Georgia up to Atlantic City, New Jersey. And we met and we started talking. We had a lot in common.

We were both single. We were both wearing Rolexes with diamonds all over them. We were both driving Mercedes.

He had lake houses and penthouses. I had penthouses in New York. We had a lot in common.

We liked fast women, fast cars, fast boats. So we hit it off real good. And he was telling me about his restaurants.

And I wanted to go down to Atlanta and see the restaurants because I had never been to the South. And the only thing that I knew of the South is what I saw on the television program, Hee Haw. And that's what I thought the South was like.

And I couldn't imagine these restaurants he was describing. And we went to Atlanta and I was very, very impressed. In fact, when I saw the skyline of Atlanta, I thought we made a wrong turn someplace and we were back in New York City.

And when I first looked at Atlanta, I said, this is what New York would like if somebody would clean out all the filth and all the garbage and all the crime. It's nice here. And he showed me the restaurants and they were very, very well run, very prosperous restaurants.

And I was going to do something with this man because I wanted these restaurants for myself. He had four of them and I wanted to open six more and then go public with it and just sell it public. And I wasn't going to give him any of the money.

And we went back to Atlantic City and I said, I'll tell you what I'll do. You don't have to give me any money. Just give me a percentage in your business, in the restaurant.

But I want to really expand the business. And he said, OK, fine. And we didn't draw up any contracts.

There were no attorneys. It was a handshake. And I told him every month I wanted him to put somebody on a plane and just fly them up to New York and bring me my percentage.

And every month somebody would come up and it would be between forty and fifty thousand dollars each month they would come and bring me. And almost a year had gone by and every month, faithfully, the man came up with the money. And I got a phone call from a man in Florida who originally called me and he said, have you heard about Carl? And I just received some money a few weeks ago and I didn't hear anything.

And I said, no. He said he was kidnapped by some drug dealers and they want a million dollars. Are they going to kill him? He said, do you think you can help him? And I had to stop and think, because I remember when I was 17 years old, I remember Carl Gambino telling me, don't ever get involved in drugs with this family.

The other families are involved in drugs, we are making billions of dollars a year without the drugs. And if you ever get involved in drugs once, there will be no second chance. And I knew they were very serious about this because three of my friends had been killed just for doing one time drug deals.

So I knew how serious they were about drugs, but the greed in me was so great I started thinking if this man gets killed, I won't see this forty or fifty thousand dollars each month. I was making millions and I was worried about forty or fifty thousand dollars. And then I reasoned with myself, well he's not a drug dealer, drug dealers kidnapped him.

So I said I would help. The position that I had and the networking, the contacts that I had within 72 hours, I found out who was behind the kidnapping, who kidnapped him, I knew the whole story. There was one man in the mafia in Detroit, Michigan, another one in Miami, Florida that organized and arranged this whole thing and they hired three drug dealers to kidnap him.

I called these two men, I asked them to meet with me, they met with me and we sat down and I asked them about this kidnapping and they were very proud about it. They were telling me how easy it went and they had this man and they were sure they were going to get the million dollars and they were probably going to kill him anyway because he was a nobody. And that's when I surprised them, I said he's not a nobody, he's with me.

And I own a percentage of their restaurant. I said I want him set free immediately and I want an example set of those three men that kidnapped him and if an example is not set I'm coming back here and setting an example with the two of you. I got home, within two days I was told two of the kidnappers were found dead in the street with bullets in the back of their head.

The third man evidently had seen his two friends were killed and he just ran away and went into hiding. The man that owned the restaurants called me up and he said Tom I understand it was you that got me set free, I don't know how I can ever thank you and I said I do, we're going to increase my percentage in your business. Increased it, it went up a lot more each month.

A few months had gone by and he called me up again. This time you could tell by his voice he was very, very nervous, something was really bothering him. And he said Tom, I need your help again.

And I said I've already saved your life, what more can I do for you? And he said well I found out two of the kidnappers were killed and the third man has been calling me up and he's saying that he knows he's next

but before they kill him he's going to come and kill me and my mother and father and my whole family. And he said Tom I believe this man because every day that I was there kidnapped this man put a gun in my mouth and said he was going to enjoy killing me and that even if we came up to a million he was going to kill me anyway. And he said I know he'll kill me and I'm afraid.

He said please send somebody down to protect me and I'll pay them whatever you tell me to pay them. And I had thought that I was looking to get out of New York for a while and this was a perfect opportunity. I can go down there myself, oversee all these restaurants and expedite everything.

And I said I'll do better than send somebody down, I'll come down myself. And as far as paying me don't worry about it, we'll just increase my percentage a little more. By now I had more percentage in his business than he had.

Went down there and first thing I asked him what is the most exclusive area to live, where are the more expensive houses. He told me and I went and I got a house there. Moved in so I had this expensive house and expensive neighborhood.

I was already driving a Mercedes, I already had the Rolex and always walking around with suits so the people in the neighborhood thought I was just another yuppie that moved in. And I noticed something when I was in Atlanta. Once a month I'd have somebody come in and check my phones, they weren't bugged.

I can go places, people weren't following me. I knew I wasn't under surveillance and I felt a sense of freedom, but there still was that void inside of me. Now that I had had that freedom that I thought was the void, I found out that wasn't the void.

And almost a year went by and we opened up six more restaurants and I was already talking with General Mills about buying it, going public with it, just buying it, leaving him out because I didn't care. Once I got the restaurants they could kill him, they could do whatever they want. I wasn't there for him, I was there for me.

And one Friday night he came to me and said there's been a debt to my family and I'm going to the funeral. And I said well everybody knows I'm here for you, nobody's going to bother you, you go to the funeral yourself. And I didn't tell him the reason I didn't go to funerals, but the reason was at funerals people cry.

And to me crying was a sign of weakness. The last time I cried I was 10 years old and I was now 39 years old. And I didn't want to be around people that cried, not only because to me it was a sign of weakness, but also it reminded me of when I was a little boy and my father used to beat me.

So he went to the funeral, I stayed in the restaurant and shortly after a man came in and I had given instructions if anybody comes looking for this man, whether the man is there or not, send him to me. And this man came over to me and he asked me where he was and I said well he'll be back in a little while, how can I help you? And he said well, he said your friend owes me some money. And I looked at this man and he didn't have any fancy jewelry or any fancy clothes and I knew he wasn't one of our suppliers.

And I just wanted this man to leave and I said how much does he owe you? And he said \$800 and I just wanted my pocket and I gave him \$800 and he started to walk away, I just stopped him. And I said you're not one of our suppliers, you have nothing to do with these restaurants, what does he owe you \$800 for?

And he said cocaine. Every day he buys eight grams of cocaine from me and pays me the next day.

And when I heard this I just became enraged because I wasn't worried about being stopped by the police and finding cocaine in the car on this man because I had already been to jail a number of times. But I was concerned about being arrested and getting back to my boss that I was involved in drugs. They killed me and here I was trying to protect this man's life and he was putting my life in danger.

So I waited until he came back and I chased the man out of the club, I put a gun in his face, told him to leave, took the \$800 back. And when the restaurant man came back, the place was packed on Friday night. I just started beating him up from one end of the bar to the other and I left him there in a pool of his own blood.

And I told him you don't have to worry about this man coming to kill you, I'm here now and if I don't have everything by Monday morning, I'll kill you. Went home, went to sleep, woke up Saturday morning. When I got up Saturday morning, I just slid to the edge of the bed and I just started looking at the house that I had.

Everything inside the house was custom made, the house itself was custom. I came home from work, turned on the television and there on the six o'clock news was Paul Castellano laying in the middle of the street in midtown Manhattan, him and his bodyguard, shot to death, killed. And they said they thought John Gotti was behind it because John Gotti wanted to be the boss of their family.

Within 48 hours, I received a telegram saying that the subpoena was canceled, there was no need for me to come to New York because the man they wanted me to testify against was now dead. Now I'm not saying in any way, shape or form that God killed Paul Castellano for me, I know he didn't. But the Bible says you reap what you sow.

Paul lived a very, very violent life. He took many other people's lives, ordered them killed, beaten, destroyed families, destroyed businesses. He lived by the sword, he died by the sword.

This totally freed me from the mafia because Paul was the only man that I answered to directly, the only man that ever gave money. This also canceled the contract on my life because Paul was the one putting up the few hundred thousand to have me killed. With him dead, nobody was going to kill me for free.

This was my total break from the mafia. I was set free. When the sun sets you free, you're free indeed.

A few months went by and I received a phone call from a doctor friend in New York and he said it's taken me some time to track you down, I finally got you and he said I know your family has disowned you, but for the past 12 or 13 years your mother has had cancer. I already removed both her breasts and some of the lymph glands and now she has bone cancer. She's in the hospital and he said, Tom, she's dying and I don't think she has two weeks left to live.

And he said even though your father don't want you around, I know you'd want to see her, so I'm telling you. I went to my employer and I asked him for a couple of days off, all he could spare was three days off. And I had to borrow, I had to take an advance and pay for the plane fare.

A year before that I could have went out and bought my own plane, my own crew and got there and this is a change in lifestyle, now I was taking advances and pay. Flew to New York, when I got to the hospital, I paused at the entrance to her room and I closed my eyes to remember the last time I saw her. And she was that typical Italian mother, four foot eleven, with a wooden spoon in one hand and the rosary beads in

the other.

She weighed about 160 pounds. And when I turned to walk into the room, what I saw broke my heart in millions of pieces. I saw a skeleton of a body, 65 pounds, laying in that bed.

On the nightstand was a picture of me when I was three years old. And I just started crying uncontrollably. I couldn't take the pain of not seeing her all these years and seeing her like this.

And she looked up and I grabbed her in my arms and I started crying and the tears in my face fell on her face. And I said, Mom, I've changed. She said, I know.

And I knew my father hadn't spoken to her. And I said, Mom, how do you know this? She said, Son, when you walked in the door, I saw Jesus walking with you. And she picked the rosaries and dropped them on the floor.

She said, I don't have to pray for you anymore. God has finally answered my prayers. I never asked God for anything.

I was so happy and content with just being saved. I had never prayed for anything for myself. But I got on my knees in that little hospital room and just cried out to God.

I said, God, I don't know how many years she's prayed for me. I remember from 15 years old on up, she probably prayed for me since I was born. That's 40 years of prayer.

And now she's dying. I said, all she ever seen me was as a gangster, my picture in the newspaper, on television. I said, God, please let her stay alive so she could see me as the man of God that she's been praying for me to be.

I said, don't take her now. God up, laid hands on her, nothing changed. Went back the next day, still nothing changed.

The third day I had to go home. Went home two days later at night, the doctor called me again and he said, Tom, I've got something to tell you. I really don't know how to explain it, so I'll just come to the point.

And I really thought that it had come to the worst. He said, every few days, he says, we take tests on your mother to see how fast the cancer is spreading so we can have an idea how much longer she's going to live. He said, the day after you left, we took tests.

We couldn't find any trace of cancer. We waited another day and took the test again and we still can't find any trace of cancer. Your mother's requesting solid food.

She's been eating solid food for the past two days. I've never seen a woman gain weight like her. We took her home.

I was going to work one morning and when I got on the highway, there was a big roadblock. There was seven or eight different county police. There was GBI, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, FBI, and I figured they were looking for some serial killer, all the people they had, and pulled over to the side of the road.

An FBI agent came out and walked up to me, somebody I had known from New York for many years. He was assigned to me in New York. And he said, Tom, please don't move.

These people know that you carry guns. And he said, they're ready to kill you if you resist arrest. And I said, what am I being arrested for? And he said, well, we have a sealed indictment and after we arrest you, we'll give you the indictment.

And as I started reading the indictment, I saw I was charged with two murders, distributing a hundred kilos of cocaine a week from Atlanta to New York, charged with racketeering and so many other things. And I looked at the indictment and I said, God, I said, this is all a mistake. This is the first time I'm in jail that I'm innocent.

And I said, so probably tonight or tomorrow, they'll realize they got the wrong person and I'll just be out of here. Well, today and tomorrow it went into a week and then it went into a month and then they flat out refused to give me any bond at all. They said I was the second most dangerous person they ever had in the Atlanta penitentiary.

The first one was Al Capone. They locked me up in a building all by myself on the fifth floor in an eight foot by six foot cell, had me locked up 23 hours a day. They would only open the door one hour a day for me to go take a shower and exercise my legs.

And I was very angry with God. I said, God, you know, what am I doing here? The judge told me he was going to give me a minimum of 400 years. I had a Jewish attorney who was not only Jewish, but he was an atheist.

And he came in and said that he don't worry about the 400 years. He can probably get it reduced to 140. I'd only be 180 by the time I got out.

And I really thought that God had failed me. And I just cried out to God. I said, God, I could have stayed in the mafia and wound up in jail and with a death penalty.

You know, 140 years in jail is a death penalty. And I got very angry with God. When I was angry with God, I couldn't hear from him.

When I finally calmed down, I said, God, what's going on here? And the Lord just shared with me again that not to worry about the circumstances, take my eyes off the circumstances, take my eyes off the judge and the prosecutor and keep my eyes on him because I was not going to be convicted that he allowed me to be there because he had something for me to do. But then after a week or so, I realized I'm in the cell house all by myself on the fifth floor, locked up 23 hours a day. Who am I going to witness to myself? I was already saved.

I started losing faith again. But after a few weeks, they brought three men in. I heard the doors open, heard it closed.

I didn't know who they were. The next day when the cells open and all four of us came out for that one hour, they looked at me and I looked at them. And I realized in the indictment, these were the three men who took the contract that tried to kill me.

I read in the indictment that they came to my house a number of times and planted remote control bombs under my bedroom window. And every time they pressed remote control, the bomb wouldn't go off. They would take the bomb out to the field someplace, press remote control, and it would explode.

They'd come back the next day with another bomb. And this just confirmed to me God's word. No weapon formed against me shall prosper, not even remote control bombs.

But when these men saw that I was there, they ran back into their cell. I went back into the cell too. And all that day, I stayed awake all that night and I began to cry.

And I said, God, I'm going to spend the rest of my life in this prison for a crime I didn't commit. I said, God, I can't do that. You know my heart.

If I'm guilty, I'll take whatever punishment I have. But I'm not guilty and I'm going to jail for 140 years. I said, God, I don't know if you'll be able to forgive me, but I'm going to kill these three men.

And then I'll understand why I'm going to spend the rest of my natural life in this prison. I said, God, I just pray you'll be able to forgive me and I could still go to heaven. I stayed awake that night, cried a lot.

The next day and I waited for the doors to open. The doors opened up and I stood there by the door and I was still crying. And I said, God, I'm just praying you'll be able to forgive me for what I'm about to do.

I really want to kill these men. I want them dead. And as I took the first step out of the cell, the Holy Spirit began speaking to me and the Holy Spirit said, I want them dead too.

And when I heard that, I really got excited. I said, oh wow, I can really do a good job. I've the best job I've ever done.

But before I took the second step, the Holy Spirit began again and said, but I don't want them slain the way men have taught you. I want them slain the way you were slain by my word. And I've allowed you to be in this place, to go to these men, tell them you forgive them, tell them you love them and to witness to them what I've done in your life.

I said, God, I can't do that. I can't look these men in the face. They've tried to kill me.

You'll have to do it because I can't. But as I walked out of the cell, one man ran inside, two stayed out. All that came out of my mouth.

I know you try to kill me. I forgive you. And I love you.

And let me tell you about my Jesus. When I was done, the two men got on their knees, accepted Christ. And I led them in that same center's prayer that my pastor led me in.

The third man came out of the cell. I had known the third man very well. He was a hired hit man, a killer that killed many people.

There's a few times I wanted him to work for me in New York. And he'd come to me and he'd say, I'm not working for you. I'm afraid of you.

I look into your eyes and all I see is death. And if I do one thing wrong, you'll kill me. I won't work for you.

But he came out of the cell that day and walked right up to me, looked me in the face. And he said, I'm not afraid of you anymore. He said, your eyes have changed.

He said, your face has changed. And even your voice has changed. He said, what have they done to you in here? And I looked, I said, it's not what they've done to me in here.

It's what Jesus has done in here. And he said, I heard what you were telling the two other men. He said, Tom, I'm a killer.

He said, but do you think if I gave God my word that I would never kill again, that he would love me and save me the way he loves and saves you? And I said, yes. And I reminded him of the beef on the cross. And he too got on his knees with a broken heart, cried.

And I led him in a sinner's prayer. It's not jailhouse religion because all three men are still in jail. All three men have one of the largest Bible studies in the prison system.

The one man who's a killer is also the chaplain's clerk. And I thought that was the end of it. I went back to my cell and I said, okay, God, I've done what you want me to do now.

Get me out of here. But God had more for me to do. He had me pray for a lot of the offices.

Some of the officials came and they said to me, we see the picture on television. We see the picture in the newspapers, what they're saying about you. But every time we come to your cell, you're reading your Bible, you're praying.

You can't be the same person they're talking about. I prayed for a lot of them, led a lot of them to Christ. Some of them came and said, my wife is sick.

My children are sick. Here's a picture of them when you pray for them. Some of them came back with reports of healing.

It was just amazing what God was doing. Then one Friday, Saturday, my pastor came to visit me and he looked very sad. I said, pastor, what's wrong? He said, Tom, your mother went home to be with the Lord last night.

He said, we tried everything we possibly could to get the judge to let you go to New York for her funeral. But the prosecutor said, no, if that man goes to New York, the mafia will kill the marshals and we'll set him free and they'll send him in Italy and Sicily someplace. We'll never be able to prosecute him.

No, he can't go. And he said, Tom, I'm real sorry. And I said, pastor, I said, if I went, all I would see is an empty shell.

I said, I'll see my mother again and not in a funeral home. And I went back to the cell and Sunday night, the lieutenant came up to me and usually when there's a death in the family, they'll come up and they'll put you on suicide watch. They'll put you in a hospital cell that's padded and take your belt and everything away from you.

And when the lieutenant came up, he said, Tom, we have to bring you downstairs. And I said, I'm a born again, spiritual Christian. And I said, my mother's home with God right now.

She's in a better place than we are. And you don't have to worry about any suicide watch. And he said, I don't know what you're talking about.

The U.S. marshals are downstairs. Went downstairs, the head U.S. marshal was there and he said, Tom, the judge called me at my home tonight. And the judge said he doesn't care what the prosecutor said.

He is not denying a man to go to his mother's funeral. And he said he couldn't bear it on his conscience if you were found innocent that he did this. So he's ordered us to take you to New York to go to your mother's funeral.

They flew me there that night. Next morning, I went to the funeral, only stayed a few minutes, stayed overnight in New York, came back Tuesday morning. My attorney said, what happened? I came to court yesterday.

It was canceled. Do you know what's going on? I said, yeah, I was in New York. And he said, don't joke about it.

I said, no, I was in New York. What had happened, I passed the Sunday night, asked the church, they said, we've tried everything legally to get the judge to send Tom to New York for his mother's funeral, but it's become impossible. And he said, when things become impossible with man, they become possible with God.

And he said, let's pray for a miracle. 7:30 at night, they prayed the prayer. Eight o'clock at night is when the judge called the marshal.

And I share this with my attorney, the Jewish atheist. And every day that we were going to trial, at least 20 or 30 members of my church would sit in the back of the church and they would just pray silently. They would pray.

And this attorney said to me, Tom, I don't know what's happening. I don't believe in God. He said, but I believe in the power of prayer.

Make these people come every day. And I looked at him, I said, well, who do you think they're praying to? And so many different miracles were happening in that courtroom. I had 57 witnesses that they had against me, 57 people I never heard of a scene in my life.

And my pastor said, how do you want the church to pray? And I said, pray that no lie will come forth in that courtroom. I want the truth to be revealed. And whatever medicine I have to take with the truth coming out, I'll take the 56 witnesses got up there on a four and a half month period and lied.

Two of them said in 1979, they saw me walk up to two men in Florida, pull out a gun, shoot both of them in the head, kill them, get in my car and drive away. And when it was my turn to get on, on the stand, my attorney asked me, how can you prove that you did not kill these two men? And I said, by using the government as witnesses and the prosecutor jumped up and said, what do you mean? I said, from 1978 to 1980, I was in a federal prison serving time. They don't let you out to kill people and let you back in.

This is the kind of things, the lies that were being told in the courtroom. I had people I'd never seen before that said I gave them millions of dollars to buy hundreds of kilos of cocaine. And I never, I never even knew what cocaine looked like.

So 56 witnesses had testified against me and I started losing faith in God. Again, I thought God was letting me down and my pastor came in and he said, Tom, for the first time that I'm visiting you, I see worry on

your face. And I said, pastor, if I get found guilty of these charges, I don't know if I could ever trust God again, because God knows it's the first time in my life I'm innocent of all these charges.

And I said, 56 people have testified and lied and we've been praying that no lies were told. And he said, Tom, there's 56, there's one more. And I said, pastor, what can one person do after 56 have buried me? And he said, I'm not talking about one person.

I'm talking about Jesus. Jesus hadn't spoken in that courtroom yet. And he said, if you have the faith of a mustard seed, he said, Tom, we can move that mountain right now.

I don't know if I had the faith of a mustard seed at that time in my life, but I agreed to pray with him. The next day we went to court and they made a big deal out of it. This was their star witness.

This was the man who went to the grand jury and gave the information to indict Tom Papanian. This is the man that once the jury hears his testimony, that they'll find me guilty beyond the shadow of a doubt. This was their prime star witness.

He got up there and after about 10 or 15 minutes, the prosecutor jumped up and he said, stop. This is not the story that you told us in the grand jury two years ago in order to indict Tom. Why are you telling a different story here today? And this man said, you paid me \$10,000 two years ago to tell that lie.

And you didn't even pay my bus fare here today. Everything stopped in that courtroom. The government just doesn't hand out \$10,000.

It's all paperwork. It took over two months for them to request all the paperwork for the 57 witnesses. We found out that almost 400 years of jail time was going to be wiped off if I was found guilty.

Most of these witnesses were serving time in jail. One man was serving a hundred year jail sentence in Florida for killing somebody. He was promised to get out by that Christmas if I was found guilty.

There was a total of \$72,000 paid to people. And when I got back to the cell and I realized God works in different ways than we expect him to work. If everybody would have told the truth, the jury might have said this is a powerful man in the mafia.

This is a very wealthy man. He either intimidated the jury or he paid them off. But God let every lie come forward so he could expose it with the truth.

He saved the truth to the end to expose all the lies so the jury would have no doubt. One end there was six of us that was charged with all these different crimes and they read off the first five names first. Everyone was found guilty.

I had 17 charges against me. The first charge the jury foreman got up said not guilty. The second, the third, fifth, ninth, tenth, fifteenth, sixteenth.

When they got to the 17th charge and said not guilty, I just couldn't hold it in anymore. I jumped off the chair onto the table. I danced like David danced.

Turned around and looked. I heard some feet moving next to me. It was that Jewish atheist on top of that table dancing too.

The prosecutor and U.S. attorney jumped up and told the judge, judge stop that. They're making a mockery of the court. The judge was a Christian.

The judge in the courtroom said that's the Holy Spirit. He started it. Let him finish it.

When the Holy Spirit was finished, I stood there in the courtroom and the judge said, what are you waiting for? You're free. Go home. I went home that day.

Went back home and I was looking to work back at my old job. I remember going to my church that Sunday. When I was locked up, they wouldn't even let me go to church.

They said I was too dangerous to be around in the penitentiary. I could escape. One person escaped in a hundred years.

They wouldn't let me out. So I hadn't even been to church. But I went to church that Sunday and that double wire trailer looked like the Taj Mahal to me.

Every tree there had a yellow ribbon on it. They had a big computer banner. Welcome home brother Tom.

It was one of the most beautiful days of my life to see myself so loved and see how God was just operating and working in my life. Just throwing his grace and love upon me at every second, everywhere I turned. And I prayed about going back to work and everything and God began speaking to me and said, no, you'll never work for man again.

You're going to work for me. I'm calling you into ministry. And I didn't think I was ready yet.

For almost two years, I fought God and I said, God, I said, I'm not ready yet. I'm a new Christian. I'm not ready.

And he kept calling me and I kept fighting. And then finally one day I just surrendered. I gave in.

I said, all right. I remember the book of Isaiah. I said, here I am Lord, send me.

What do you want to send me? And he said, back into the prisons. And I said, no, I'm not here Lord. You're not sending me to prisons.

I've been almost 10 years of my life. I said, let me tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to go speak to young people.

And the Lord said, no, you're going back into the prisons. And I said, no, I'm not. I'm sharing this with young people.

Sat down, look in the phone book in Atlanta, found every church, every Christian youth organization I could find and wrote a letter. Never got a response from one of them. Nobody even said, thank you for being interested.

Or we received your letter. Nothing. But I got a phone call from a warden that said, I've been watching you ever since you've been arrested.

And there's men in this prison that are never getting out. And they don't have any hope. And he said, I know it's against regulations because you're an ex-convict to bring you back into a jail.

He said, but would you come back into our jail and share your testimony with these men? I went that day, a few hundred men, some of the most hardened criminals, came just like I did, knelt down at their knees with broken hearts and humbleness, cried and accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Word spread around. And the next thing you know, every time I pick up the phone, somebody was inviting me to a city jail, county jail, federal jail, state jail.

Before I realized that I was in prison ministry. And I just let it go about speaking to young people. I said, God, if you want me in prison ministry, I'll go.

I said, what church do I work for? And he said, no church. I said, what Christian organization? He said, none. I said, okay, what prison ministry? And he said, none.

You work for me. I said, God, if I do that, I said, how do I pay rent? How do I buy food? How do I put clothes and gas in the car? And he spoke to me and he said, I am Jehovah Jireh. I didn't know what that meant.

I had to get my Bible and look. And I realized it meant that he is the provider. And he said, if you'll go wherever I send you, I will provide all your needs.

And I said, God, I said, I don't want to name this ministry after me because I believe all ministry is God's ministry. And he just chooses some of us to manage it for a season or whatever. And I said, God, what can I name this ministry? I want you to get all the glory in this.

I don't want any glory at all. He said, what were you saved by? I said, you're saving grace. He said, that's the name of the ministry.

God's saving grace ministry. We started that. I started going into the prison, started speaking at different churches, never to any young people.

And in 1989 to 1991, I was just going in and out of the prison, speaking at different places. In 1991, Morris Cirillo invited me to Anaheim, California. He had a convention there with 6,000 pastors from all over the world.

I was told 40 nations were represented there. And I went there and I shared my testimony and a man came up to me from Jamaica. And he said, we need you in Jamaica to come into our penitentiary.

The men need to hear your testimony. Would you please come? I'll pay for everything, all the expenses. And I told him I would come.

And a few months later, he sent me the plane ticket and I flew there. And when I got there, he had a very sad face. And I said, pastor, what's wrong? He said, Tom, yesterday there was a riot in the prison and 11 people were killed and they've shut down the prison for all outside visitors.

He said, I didn't want to bring you here for nothing. He said, so I spoken to the mayor of Kingston and he's agreed to open up the entire school system for the next two weeks, one hour early. So you can go and speak in every school.

And in that two weeks, I had access to speak to over 17,000 young people. Some of them gave their lives to Christ. Not all of them did, but I had 17,000 young people.

And I realized that was God giving me the desire of my heart. After I was obedient for two years, never asked him again. He knew it was in my heart.

I never mentioned it. When I came back from Jamaica, almost every one of those letters that I sent out two years earlier were in my mailbox. I spent the next year speaking at nothing but prisons and youth camps, youth organizations and churches.

Everywhere I go and tell people, if God can do this with somebody like me, he can do it with anybody. I go places and after I keep them in their seats for two hours, I tell them, you know, I could tell my testimony in about 45 seconds. One day God had nothing better to do.

So he just rolled up his sleeve and put his hand into the very pit of hell and he reached around for the filthiest, dirtiest, slimiest thing he could find and he found me. And he just plucked me out right out of the devil's hand and washed me with the blood of Jesus Christ, made me white as snow and said, now go into the world and preach the gospel. I sat at a table with a police officer who told me about this tape.

He said, Mike, have you heard this tape? I've listened to it. I've shared it with many, many people and they all think it's marvelous. You need to present it on Focus on the Family.

Well, here we are. You had already heard it. I was familiar with it and we were already planning to present it here.

Well, somebody sent it to me a couple of months ago and I tell you, it really moved me. The beauty of the message, and I really want to emphasize this, Mike, the beauty of the message is not focused on Tom Papanian. What really moves me about the story is that no one is beyond the reach of the Holy Spirit.

He cares about us. You can just see God wooing this man and caring about him and seeing to it that the good news of the gospel was given to him. Why would the Lord care about him? He was a member of a crime family.

He had done all kinds of illegal things. He didn't seem to have any spiritual nature at all and yet you can see in retrospect that the Lord was out there drawing him to himself. The significance of that message is that we're talking to people right now who have a checkered past, maybe a bloody past.

We're talking to people who have secrets in their lives. They've done terrible things and because of that they feel, God couldn't love me and God couldn't forgive me. If he can forgive Tom Papanian, he can forgive you, my friend, and all you have to do is ask him.

Repent of your sins and ask him to forgive you and he will do it and fill your life. You may not have as much money as you do now. He may ask you to do some things you wouldn't otherwise do, but I tell you it's a better life and then there's all of eternity to gain.

I hope that there are people listening to us today who understand the truth of this message. Not just a story, but the biblical and spiritual truth in what happened to this man, Tom Papanian. You suggested that we're talking to people who have not made that commitment to Jesus Christ.

We're also talking to a lot of moms and dads and friends who are praying for other individuals, for children, just like Tom's mom prayed for him for years, that his life would be changed, that he would encounter Jesus in a dramatic way, and those prayers were answered. Be encouraged, those of you who are

praying. And with that, we've come to the end of this Focus on the Family cassette.

We hope this message was uplifting to you and we encourage you to pass this tape along to a friend. Also, if you too find yourself on the edge of making a decision to open your heart to the Lord, as did Tom Papanian, or if you're a new Christian, we'd like to send you a free booklet entitled, Coming Home, an Invitation to Join God's Family. Simply request this free booklet when you write to us at Focus on the Family, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80995.

Or in Canada, Box 9800, Vancouver BC, V6B 4G3. And thank you for listening.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/23/SID23617.mp3>
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