

God's Grace IS Sufficient

by Johnny Chatham - Now Present with the Lord Jesus Christ

As a young boy, I was raised in church and was definitely taught right from wrong. As with any family, we had our good times and bad. Looking back, I can now see that the good times outweighed the otherwise not so good times. It has taken quite a while to come to this realization. I am now going to share with you how several years of my life were stolen by Satan. The great thing is that it does not end there; God, in His infinite grace, has given me a fresh start.

In 1984 I was attending Oklahoma University as a freshman. I was living life on my own in an apartment without the restrictions of "Mom and Dad." I began to explore in an area that I had no business in. I would come home on weekends, barring no games, as I was a member of the O.U. marching band. Mom could sense that something was bothering me; call it maternal instinct. She would simply ask, "Is everything okay?" I would always answer, "yes." My exploring into this new world became deeper. I began buying pornographic material and hiding it.

During my sophomore year of college I moved back home. One day my mother went to my car to get something and she found my magazines. Later that day, my parents said, "We need to talk, please meet in the living room." I knew exactly what the question was going to be. The question hit like a fiery dart: "John, - - - are you gay?" I just sat there, thinking how to avoid this direct question. Again, the question came, and I sat there motionless. It was then that I was told of the magazines that were found in my car. With that evidence, I said, "yes." When I look back, that was the hardest thing to say.

They couldn't believe it. They asked me if I was going to change. I didn't believe that I could change. I had fallen for the lie that was just simply the way I was. I was asked to move out a short time later.

The next few years proved to be very difficult. Mom would call to see how I was. There was always a tear in her eye, you could tell by the quiver in her voice. She would plead with me to come home. I couldn't though. I was so caught up in my homosexuality. I didn't believe that there was any other life. What a lie the devil can throw! I would go and visit my parents or they would come to my apartment, the only problem was that by the end of our visits the words would only hurt more and put a deeper wedge between us. Mom and dad only wanted the best for me and homosexuality certainly wasn't it!

In 1992, I moved to Arlington, Texas. My dad's youngest brother had recently moved and went to work with a company there. He had talked to dad about me coming to live with him and applying for a job. I applied and got the job. I was also working part-time at a restaurant. My uncle thought that this would be a good opportunity. He knew the family stress we were all going through. He thought it would do some good if I could get a fresh start on life; and get away from mom and dad so we could learn to appreciate each other, as we had years ago. Arlington turned into a disaster. Within a few short months, I was fired. However, I wasn't too concerned, after all, I could go full-time with the restaurant. Slowly I began to skip payments on bills, because I was using my money on entertainment. The bills became further behind as I played. My money went to the bars and to the parties. Whenever you get involved in sin or addiction, you find yourself having to go further into it to achieve the same pleasure. You have to experience more and more to be happy. Alcohol could no longer satisfy me like it did, and when I realized the next step I felt helpless. A great part of the homosexual lifestyle is a world of drugs. I look back now and can see the irony. Many homosexuals live a life that they believe to be normal and yet they have to use drugs to alter their feelings so they can enjoy more intently this "normal" life.

It was the first part of May 1993 and I had a friend tell me of a business known as Plasma Alliance. It is an organization that filters the plasma from your blood and they pay you \$20.00. A person goes through a rigorous question time as well as a physical. After all is done, about four hours later, you are allowed to donate plasma. About two weeks later, I received a registered letter from Plasma Alliance. Being new to the "plasma game," I thought that this was their way of notifying me of the results and to let me know I was welcome back to donate again. But the letter said that they needed to see me personally. I went to the clinic, my name was called and I followed the doctor to an office. The conversation was started the same way another conversation had been started eight and a half years earlier, "Johnny, do you lead a homosexual lifestyle?" I told her I had, and asked the reasoning for this questioning. She told me the lab had detected a problem. With the next sentence, my world came crashing down around me. She took my hand in hers and said, "You have tested positive for HIV." I didn't know what to say. I was in literal shock. I finally made it back to my apartment which seemed to take forever. I looked out the window into the trees that were so green with new leaves and began to cry. All I could think of was remembering how I had thought so many times before, "it couldn't happen to me." And how a year earlier I had told my sister, "Deb, don't worry I won't get AIDS."

Mom and dad had tried reaching me for weeks but I never returned their calls. I knew what I was involved in was wrong, but I didn't feel like it was, that wrong, as long as I didn't hear them telling me. The parental calls kept coming at work,

and I would tell the hostess just to tell them I was too busy and I would call later, but I never did. With the latest "news," there was no way I could call them now. This would be the final blow to an already worried family. To my surprise and shock, mom and dad decided that a salad and tea sounded good. The only catch was that it sounded good in Texas! I was a nervous wreck. Not only did I have to keep my other tables going, I had to get myself mentally prepared for the discussion I knew would come when I got off from work.

The next few hours were hard, because we sat in the parking lot of the restaurant for this discussion. They started off by asking me why I had not returned their phone calls. And why I caused them to have to drive three and a half hours to talk to me. I apologized and informed them that their worst nightmare had come true. Their son was HIV positive. Mom immediately began crying. This had to be one of the hardest things my parents could ever go through. Then dad told me that he and mom had come to take my car back to Oklahoma City. The car note was in their name and I had not made payments for three months. With the new "news," they agreed to leave the car, so I could go and have more complete medical tests. But I never went for more tests. The next two weeks were a constant party. I felt I had nothing to lose. Saturday night of Memorial Day weekend came, and I had been awake all night. Just as the night seemed endless, so did the drugs and alcohol. I can still remember at 8:00 a.m. that Sunday laying on my living room floor and crying. I was so lonely and didn't know how to reach out to anyone. I turned over on my back and said out loud, "God, there has got to be more to life than this" and I continued to cry. Four hours later, mom and dad showed up at the door. I looked awful. It was very obvious what I had been up too. We all sat down and dad asked what I was going to do. I told him that I would like to come back home, if I could. I laid everything on the line. When I did that, we moved forward as a family. We got a "U-Haul," which on Sunday is no small feat in Texas. By 10:00 p.m., the truck was loaded and we pulled into Mustang, Oklahoma at 2:00 a.m. God was already working overtime to get me home where I truly belonged.

Two weeks later our family went to Glorietta, New Mexico to the Southern Baptist Bible Conference. I didn't know what I would find there, but mom and dad wanted me to go. It was a time that God really began showing Himself to me. I also think that they were too scarred to leave me for a week, knowing what I had just come through. God didn't waste any time. He began talking directly to the family through His Word from the first sermon. We knew that God was wanting to work in our lives, but at the same time, Satan wasn't too pleased at what was happening. Tuesday night we had a huge confrontation. I found myself very upset that dad and mom could even suggest that I might not be saved. I told my parents that I believed I was saved at age seven. Dad said that his observation was simply on the fact of what he had observed the past several years of my life, that I had been running from God instead of to Him. He told me that great men and women of the Bible have sinned, but that they didn't continue to live in the sin as I had. He specifically reminded me of David and Bathsheba, and how David went as far as to murder someone to conceal it. Yet when David was confronted with his sin he was repentant. It was Wednesday morning and I told mom and dad that I was going to stay at the cabin and have some quiet time with God and think about what we had talked about the night before. I opened my Bible and there it was - - Psalm 51! The caption told me what dad had mentioned the night before. There was no denying it! God was up to something big in my life. I read it and began weeping. I had no idea where the Psalm was located and here it was right before my eyes. Verse 17 says: "The sacrifice God wants is a broken spirit. God you will not reject a heart that is broken and sorry for sin." (New Century). God was showing me that He loved me. That night found us in the sanctuary for yet another "hit between the eyes" sermon. When the invitation came, I began playing the game of "if they sing one more stanza, then . . ." God knew this too, and we sang more that night than any other night. The reason that I was so hesitant was simple to me. By accepting Christ as my Lord and Savior, my life would have to change, the homosexuality, the parties, everything! How could I give that up? That was my whole life, and quite honestly, my crutch and excuses for a lot of my problems in life. Standing there at the pew with my head bowed, I heard an audible voice, "Thou shall have no other gods before Me." I knew it was the Lord. What He was telling me, was that my "life" had become my god, that it was an idol. I walked to the front, weeping, and for the first time, I TRULY accepted God. I shattered my old life and believed that God would give me a much better one. God is so much bigger than any problems we face. We just have to believe that, and let Him be God. Mom and dad had no idea the decision I had made. But they were completely elated to find out. We returned home excited at what God had done and how His timing was perfect. Three short weeks ago, I was in an apartment lonely and crying, and now I was a joint heir with Christ!

It was at this point that we went to visit Mike Hawkins with Christian AIDS Network (CAN) at First Stone Ministries. I received true hope through Mike's testimony, "Adventure In Divine Submission." God can work through this sickness! I had another complete blood count (CBC) run as well as a general physical. The news was great! My blood counts were where they should be and all internal organs were functioning properly. But the news that I wasn't prepared to hear was within one month, my "T" cell count had dropped 125 points. My count was 275 the month before, and now it was 150. With a count below 200, people are officially considered to have AIDS. The nurse told me to remain calm and not freak out. This time was different from when I had been told that I was HIV positive. This time I looked at the chart, then I looked at her, and said, "My God is bigger than that number." I'm not saying that there are not times when I haven't cried, because there are. There are also times when mom and dad cried. Tears are a normal part of grief.

The past few months have brought great changes into our family. First, and foremost, we are a family again! We have also been introduced to a dear friend who heads up the "Christian AIDS Network," with First Stone Ministries in Oklahoma City. I have met such sweet, and understanding people who believe that through Christ Jesus, anything can be changed, even a person who believes that homosexuality is their only option, as I once did. God has become real in our lives. I look back on the years that were so wasted and realize that even then, God had His hand on me. God has

brought me through a lot of areas that most people cannot even fathom. I don't believe that God would bring me this far just to let me down. You know, even in death there really is victory with Jesus. The only tragedy in this disease would be, that the name of God would not be exalted. We are to give thanks in ALL things, and I give Him thanks because it has kept my family's focus on God. God is the only one who will sustain us through the difficult times and we will rely upon His Grace, truly His Grace IS Sufficient!