

# **BECOMING** THE **PROMISE** YOU ARE INTENDED TO BE

The following pages are the story behind the title you just read. It was a pivotal moment in my life that led me directly to where I am today and where I will be tomorrow.

The book has helped many readers take significant steps in their lives and it is my hope that you too will be inspired to Become the Promise You are Intended to Be.

Your help in sharing the stories and how they made you feel will contribute to my dream of serving the millions of people who are suffering in silence.

**JESUS D HERNANDEZ JR.**

# Story 1

## Is There a Prize in the Darkness?

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This is the genesis story for the title of this book, more importantly, this arrangement of words has been my guiding light or true north. Like most treasures, there are challenges to overcome in order to access the prize. In this case, the challenge I had to endure was the consequences of my fourth DWI. I was facing prison and needed help to stop drinking, I needed outside help. I had fooled myself into thinking I could do it alone several times before. Each stretch of sobriety began with support from other people, whether I liked it or not, and each time was predicated by a run-in with the law and court-mandated sobriety. I still hadn't come to terms with the fact that the short sprints of sobriety were the result of letting people speak into my life. My pride and fear hid this from me. I know now part of the magic is doing life with others.

I was dreading the thought of going to prison, it meant I would be leaving this life I had built behind and not knowing what I would come back to. Prison meant a hard pause on everything until I got out. I reached out to a friend who is a former Bexar County prosecutor, I told her, *'I'm in trouble, I need an attorney,'* her response was, 'I know somebody, but it's gonna cost you.' Fortunately, I had the cash (my frugal ways have helped me more than once with my interactions with the law) so I connected with the attorney and told him my whole story. He said, "Oh yeah, this is really serious." He recommended I go to a recovery center here in San Antonio, I said, *'OK, not a problem,'* and he went on to tell me I would have to check into the "inpatient program." I had been through outpatient programs before, not by choice, they were court-mandated, but the difference is *inpatient* means you're there all day, you're living there for a period of time. At *outpatient* programs, you get to drive back and forth after work or on weekends. You can still do your life. I told my lawyer I couldn't do inpatient because of my job. His loving reply was, "Well, you don't have to do inpatient, you can go to prison instead." I really appreciated his frank style of communication, no dancing or softening of things, just the facts.

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I looked at my work benefits package to see what my insurance would cover and my insurance would not cover the place he recommended. I found a few other options, came back to him, and said, '*Hey man, my insurance won't cover the place you want me to go to, but it will cover these places.*' The rehab facilities my insurance would cover were way fancier places. In his loving and nurturing way, my lawyer again says, "Well, if you wanna go to prison, go to the country club, if you wanna stay out of prison, go to the one I am recommending." I said, '*Son of a gun!!!*' His response to my reaction was, "Look Jess, you seem to be the type of guy that knows how to make things happen." I said, '*Well yeah,*' and he continued, "Well, then I need you to make this happen."

After a lot of calls, I learned that the spot he recommended would take me if I was willing to pay out of pocket, and because I was paying out of pocket, I would be placed at the front of the line since I didn't qualify for public assistance to pay my fees. This was a relief and less than awesome at the same time. A relief because I knew getting treatment right after being arrested would look good in court, yes, this whole thing began with selfish intent, and a *hard pill to swallow* because I would be living every hour in a restricted environment with people I did not get to pick. I signed up and let my job know I would be checking in to this inpatient program. They were in full support, they wanted to make sure I got help. It sounded like everyone at my job was excited for me. However, this wasn't true, there were several folks who were fed up with my antics, and rightfully so. Still, I had fierce support from my now mentor and then boss. The support he offered me was exactly what I needed. I know I speak of this situation rather matter-of-factly, but inside, I was drowning in shame and fear. He supported me and visited me several times while I was in rehab. That meant a ton to me, it still does. I felt valued.

was on my way to inpatient rehab for 30 days and it was going to be a gigantic shift in my life. I was working 12+ hours a day, six or seven days a week. I was training for a marathon, always out, busy doing something. I had access to the internet, Netflix, social media, and all the luxuries. At this rehab center, it was all men, with no independent rooms, meaning we shared “quads” with no doors and no walls, two grown men to a little 8 by 8 quad, shared showers, and shared bathrooms. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were dictated by the facility, meaning we just ate what we were served. Meals were served on a tight schedule. There was no food for us outside of that schedule. I was not allowed access to the internet and no cell phones. There were pay phones that we could use but only under certain conditions. I was about to be entirely cut off from what had become my life. I was freaked out about this because I still hadn't had my awakening. I was still full of pride with denial sprinkled on top. My biggest concern was not working, as if the company would shut down without me. The truth was I didn't know who I was without my job.

Because I had gone to outpatient rehab a few times and court-mandated therapists, I knew what they would be expecting. By “they” I mean the counselors, they're looking for certain behavior and certain patterns of thinking in my speech. I planned to go in, play my role, go through the motions, and make sure it looked good for the judge, so I wouldn't go to prison.

Even though I had gained some appreciation for life, I was still taking a whole lot for granted. There were a whole bunch of men there that had no other choice and no place to go. Their families had disowned them and their children didn't want to have anything to do with them. They could not keep a job, this rehab facility was the only place they could have stability, in terms of a place to sleep and a meal to eat. And I was planning on *faking* my way through it.

By the grace of God, I wasn't in their situation YET, but had I kept drinking, this would have absolutely been my future. For some of my brethren, it was their first time getting drug or alcohol convictions. They were in the same type of denial that I had been consumed by after my previous arrests. I started noticing that I could help them with my experience of going through the court system, being arrested, and getting sober. You have probably heard the term "rock bottom." *Rock bottom* is a relative concept meaning my bottom is the absolute *bottom-est* I have ever experienced. Your bottom may be higher or could be lower. The truth is the rock bottom I reached the last time is going to be high for me next time, every time I engaged in my addiction, my bottom kept getting lower, this is how it works. The bottom just keeps getting lower and lower and we get to pick.

I was hanging out with these guys and started recognizing all of a sudden, or more like seeing a glimpse of the fact, that my escapades, my failures, and my shortcomings could help someone else. There was a little picnic table that faced the sunrise in the yard. Being an early riser, I'd sit at this table and journal in the mornings. We didn't have to get out of bed until 7am but I would wake up before 5am. I would start my morning with some exercise in the bathroom and do some reading while waiting for the doors to open at 6am. Some of the guys would stay in bed until the counselors would make the call which meant "get your behind up and moving." While sitting at that table, as the days went by, one guy would come and sit and we would talk, then another guy would come and sit. Little by little, it became a regular thing and there was a group of three or four of us. We would share our concerns, our problems, and our fears. Since I was the veteran, they nicknamed me "ole school" because I had a little more "seasoning" than they did. To my surprise, my influence started growing.

I went to all the classes, not missing a single one. I played out my role saying all the things I knew they wanted to hear, until one day one of the counselors pulled me aside. He said, "I need to talk to you," I said, 'What's up?'

He went on, "I see you, it's like I see flashes of you, of everything you got within you. Then I see this pretender thing, this thing you're doing right now." I was shocked, *'What are you talking about man, like I'm doing the damn thing, I ain't causing no problems?'* Then he would go on to say the words that transformed my thinking, he said, "No man, you know what it is, you don't have a problem admitting you're an alcoholic, I see you in every meeting, you don't hesitate to step up and say my name's Jesse and I'm an alcoholic or addict. Your problem is you haven't accepted it."

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Some people like to play with words when feeling conviction. I am one of those people, I will trivialize or generalize people's words to wiggle my way out. So, of course, I went to generalization, *'Hey man, come on dude, you're just playing with words here.'* He stood firm and said, "Your problem is you haven't accepted that if you continue living the way you're living, you will never become the promise you are intended to be." Right then as the words were coming out of his mouth, I knew all the way to my bones, exactly what he was talking about. His words gave form to the *ick* I felt every time I made selfish decisions, every time I was drinking and driving, lying, and manipulating. Each time I indulged in devious behavior, I had this deflating feeling of *'Man Jess, what are you doing?'* which, of course, I rationalized away with, *'You have a job, you've got a car, you pay your bills.'* I used all these things to fool myself into thinking I was a *'good'* person.

But, I was totally swimming in self-betrayal. I get these giant flashes while watching a movie, meeting someone amazing, or reading a book, something inside me clicks. I see someone sacrificing themselves for the sake of others or taking on an impossible task against all odds, and something inside me says, *'I can do that, that's what I need to be doing, that's how I need to be serving.'*

Then the garbage man in my head shows up, *'Man come on let it go, it's a movie, you ain't all that. Chill out, come back to reality.'* Still, for that hot second, I could taste my potential...in those moments, I knew I was wasting my potential. This is what ran through me when my counselor said, "You will not become the promise you are intended to be." That truth took me to those moments when I aspired to be something *great*, when for a flash, I felt and knew I was meant for *greater things*. It took me back to the times I had done despicable things, and I knew I could do better. His words brought back all the disappointment I had planted in so many eyes. He had shown me that I have a choice.

“ Your problem is you haven't accepted that if you continue living the way you're living, you will never become the promise you are intended to be. ”

Something amazing happened after he dropped these words. The facility had a walking track that I normally ran around a bunch of times. Instead, I went for a stroll on the track. I chewed on the words he said, "If you continue to live life the way you're living it..." He didn't say if you continue to drink, he didn't say if you continue to use, he said, "If you continue living life this way, you will not become the promise you're intended to be." I had to examine how I was living life, beyond the drinking, the using, and the womanizing. How was I living life? The answer was I lived life isolated, sealed off, protected, and guarded. I was cut off. I had elaborate defense mechanisms that no one could make it through. These defense mechanisms were so well developed that I was able to convince people they knew all of me, convince them that they had access to the tender bits of me. The reality was they didn't. Nobody had access, the walls were so thickly established, even I lost access to me.

As I was jogging around the track, the fourth step prayer came to mind. I'm probably gonna mess it up but it goes something like this, *'I offer myself to you, to build with me and do with me as you will. Free me from the bondage of self so that I may better serve your will. Relieve me of all my difficulties so that my victory over them may bear witness to those I would serve of your power, your love, and your way of life.'*

The second half of this prayer is the most important part for me. *'Relieve me of all my difficulties...'* This is me asking for help! I ran the words through my head, then I had to say them out loud. The first half was not a problem, *'Release me from the bondage of self,'* I was all caught up in self. I was a black hole of need, everything was about me. *'So that I may better serve your will,'* serving his will means me sharing my gifts and talents with others. The gifts and talents are instincts that I had been suppressing because of the traumas, the pain, and the disappointment that I allowed to convince me I was *'less than.'* *'Relieve me of all my difficulties,'* to this day, I have difficulties that I don't understand but I can't even count how many difficulties I have overcome along the way. I know I've overcome these difficulties because I finally asked for help. I finally became willing to receive help and support outside of me.

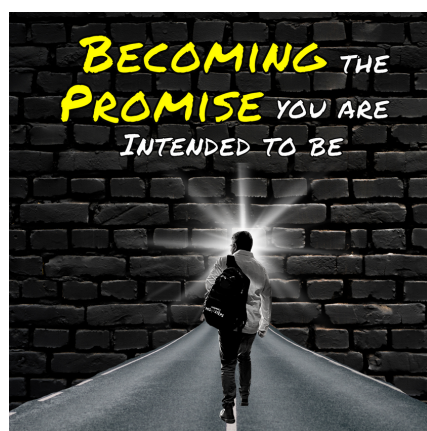
I was crying on that little track, I had my shades on so my boys couldn't see me crying. That was it. I had to change, I had to change the way I was living. I doubled down and prayed, *'OK, thank you, I hear you, I see you, I feel you and I see me.'* I decided from that point forward, I would serve. I began having deep, hard conversations with the guys. I formed a connection with those men that I had never formed before with anyone. It was because I let them in.

I started telling them what I was afraid of, how I failed, what I learned, what I hoped, and what I wished. I admitted that I cared about them and that I missed them when they didn't show up. I shared how I was worried about them giving up and leaving. All these little fears I'd been holding on to for years, I was sharing with these guys.

I felt myself growing like the Grinch's little heart started beating and growing and growing and growing. This is what was happening within me. Ever since then, the fourth step prayer and becoming the promise I am intended to be are my True North, the guiding principles that I follow in all things. In order to do this I have to let people in, I have to share my gifts and talents in service to others. I have to ask for help, I have to receive help, and I get to be more human. I get to spend more time seeing me in other people's eyes, their smiles and their gratitude while looking at this amazing person I never thought I could be. I get to see it every single day and I am grateful for that. I believe you can have the same thing. I believe the family member you're thinking about giving up on because you're terrified for them, I believe he and she can have the same thing. I believe those of you struggling in silence, carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders, the mothers, the fathers that don't know the answers, I know there's no guarantee everything's going to be comfortable and as nice as you envision it, but I believe you too can have this. We just can't keep living life the way we've been living it. We have to let people in, there are too many of us for you and me to continue walking alone.

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