

***“I’ve taken a man’s life . . .
and I deserve whatever
happens to me. But do you
think God can forgive me?”***

Bruno (not his real name) had reached the pinnacle of success. He owned his own business and lived in a nice home. He drove a BMW and had a beautiful wife. It seemed that his happiness would never end.

But problems began to surface and his marriage fell apart. Before long, he would do something he would live to regret.



I met Bruno in April 2002 at the Baltimore County Detention Center in Towson, Md., where I served as chaplain. Bruno, a dark-skinned black man, was a hulking figure with sad eyes – an expression that told you something was wrong. He was being held on a charge of first-degree murder.

“I’ve been trying to reach you for a long time,” Bruno said as he greeted me with a handshake. He offered me a chair. The 30-year-old man rarely smiled and was often ignored by those around him. He felt that people were either afraid of him, or they simply hated him. Either way, most people, including other inmates, would not give him the time of day.

Without any prompting from me, Bruno began to tell me his story. As he did, he started to cry. “I can’t believe I’ve ended up this way,” he said, with tears rolling down his face. “I’d never been in trouble with the law. I can’t believe this is happening.”

The most horrible thing

He told me that he was at the end of his rope. Loneliness had set in like a heavy sack and all he could see was despair. Eventually, Bruno said he had started to think of how he would take his own life. As he sat in front of me, with his elbows resting on his knees, he said he’d done the most horrible thing imaginable – he’d killed another human being.

“I’ve taken a man’s life . . . and I deserve whatever happens to me,” he said. He wiped his face and paused. Then he looked me in the eyes and asked: “But do you think God can forgive me?”

That question hit me with a wave of emotion as I thought about the Good News of Jesus Christ and how He came to save us from our sins. I eagerly shared the message of God’s grace with Bruno and then asked him a simple question: “Have you trusted Christ as your Savior?”

Shaking his head, he said, “No,” and started sobbing profusely. When I asked if he would like to, he immediately said, “Yes.” He then bowed his head and prayed to receive Christ into his life. When he lifted his head, he was beaming with a bright smile, and the man with the sad eyes was no longer there.

Bruno’s life was so drastically transformed, that he made an incredible impression on other inmates, correctional officers and the entire medical staff. He soon led more than 30 people to Christ and played a vital role in most of the religious programs at the facility. Because of God’s grace, Bruno went from being the most despised and feared man in the facility, to the most loved and respected. He found favor with all who worked around him. He accepted what he’d done as sin and committed his future to God. He’s using his talents to help others who are in need.

Can you relate?

Can you relate to Bruno’s story? Perhaps you, too, have hurt someone, or you have taken from someone. Maybe you have committed a crime, or even murdered or raped someone. You might also be doing time for your crime.

If you’re like many people behind bars, you find yourself thinking about your past. In the late hours of the night, when it’s dark and quiet, you see the faces of the people you hurt. You hear their voices and their cries for help.

You may try to justify your actions by saying, “They deserved it.” Or maybe you blame the victims or someone else for what you did. But deep down inside, you know you were wrong. And when others aren’t looking, you might even cry at times.

It is not uncommon for people facing these types of situations to experience guilt, regret, and deep depression. Some try to mask it and pretend they’re tough. They act as if all is OK. Some turn to drugs and alcohol to dull the pain and cloud the bad memories. Many feel so disgusted and hopeless they consider suicide.

When all is said and done, there is a single burning question that churns in their minds: “Will God forgive me?” And the answer is, “ABSOLUTELY if you come to Him in faith, and request His forgiveness in sincerity.”



Good news for all

It is wonderful to know that what God did for Bruno, He will do for anyone who places his trust in Jesus Christ as Savior. God loves us and is more than willing to forgive us of our sins. He said: **“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins”** (Isaiah 43:25, NKJV). The Bible also notes: **“The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him”** (Daniel 9:9, NIV). Forgiveness – of all sins – is available simply for the asking.

God’s love for us is beyond anything we can imagine. His mercy endures forever. **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16, NKJV).

When I think of Bruno’s story, I’m reminded of the Apostle Paul who was once a blasphemer, persecutor and a violent man, but God had mercy on him. Paul was responsible for the deaths of Christians, but God’s grace made a difference in his life (1 Timothy 1:12-16; Acts 22:4, 19-20; 26:10-11). Paul did not actually murder people, but he used his authority to have them arrested and executed because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul was quite mindful of his past. He knew about the baggage he carried, the pain he’d caused, and the terror he brought to the lives of many innocent people. He also knew how people feared him because of his past behavior. In fact, as he reflected on his past, he wrote: **“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God”** (1 Corinthians 15:9, NIV).

God has a plan

Yes, Paul had done some things that he deeply regretted. He had a bad reputation, and he felt remorseful. At the same time, he must have wondered about the people who knew of his past: What would they say? How would they treat him?

But the Lord showed mercy and sent him into the world to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. In other words, God had a plan for Paul's life. And despite his concerns about his past, the Lord still had a purpose for him. Paul discovered the grace of God. For this reason he could say: **"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief"** (1 Timothy 1:15, NKJV).

As with Paul, the Lord also has a plan for you. Despite your concerns about your past, God still has a purpose for your life. It does not matter who you are or what you have done; God's grace – His underserved kindness -- is all you need. This amazing grace is seen in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus: **"But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners"** (Romans 5:8, NLT); **"We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved...."** (Acts 15:11, NIV).

Jesus came into the world as a man, and He died on the cross for our sins. He died for people just like you and me. His sacrificial death was required by God the Father as payment for our sins. Jesus shed his blood so that our sins could be washed away. **"To Him all the prophets witness that, through His [Jesus'] name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins"** (Acts 10:43, NKJV); **"...The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"** (1 John 1:7, NKJV).

Jesus rose from the dead on the third day of his burial, and He is alive forevermore. He longs to save you and to forgive you of all your sins. **"'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool'"** (Isaiah 1:18, NKJV)



What will you do?

Have you trusted Christ to save you? Have you asked Him to forgive you of all sins and to enter your life as your personal Lord and Savior? Have you believed on Him for eternal life? If your answer is "No," then I urge you to call on Him TODAY! **"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"** (Romans 10:13). You may pray as follows:

Dear God, Thank you for loving me. I believe that Jesus Christ died for me and that he rose from the dead. Please forgive me of all my sins.

Come into my life and be my Lord and Savior. Right now, as best I know how, I accept you by faith -- and your FREE gift of eternal life. Thank you. Amen.

After placing your faith in Christ, there are several things you should do to grow and to know him better: talk to Him in prayer and read your Bible every day; tell others about Christ and about your experience; be baptized and join a Christ-centered church.

Write me so that I may rejoice with you. I'll also send you FREE helpful literature. Write to: Dr. Roscoe Barnes III, P.O. Box 421, Centreville, Miss. 39631. Or send email to RoscoeBarnes3@yahoo.com.

About the Author

Roscoe Barnes III, Ph.D., is a professional writer, prison chaplain, and independent scholar of Church History. He is the author of 14 books and 12 Gospel tracts. He also is widely published in newspapers and magazines. He holds an earned doctorate from the University of Pretoria, South Africa; and an M.A.R. from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pa.

In addition to having served as pastor and evangelist, Dr. Barnes has served as a chaplain assistant in the U.S. Army. For several years he hosted Christian radio programs in Mississippi and Kansas. While in Baltimore, Md., he served as chaplain for Good News Jail & Prison Ministry.

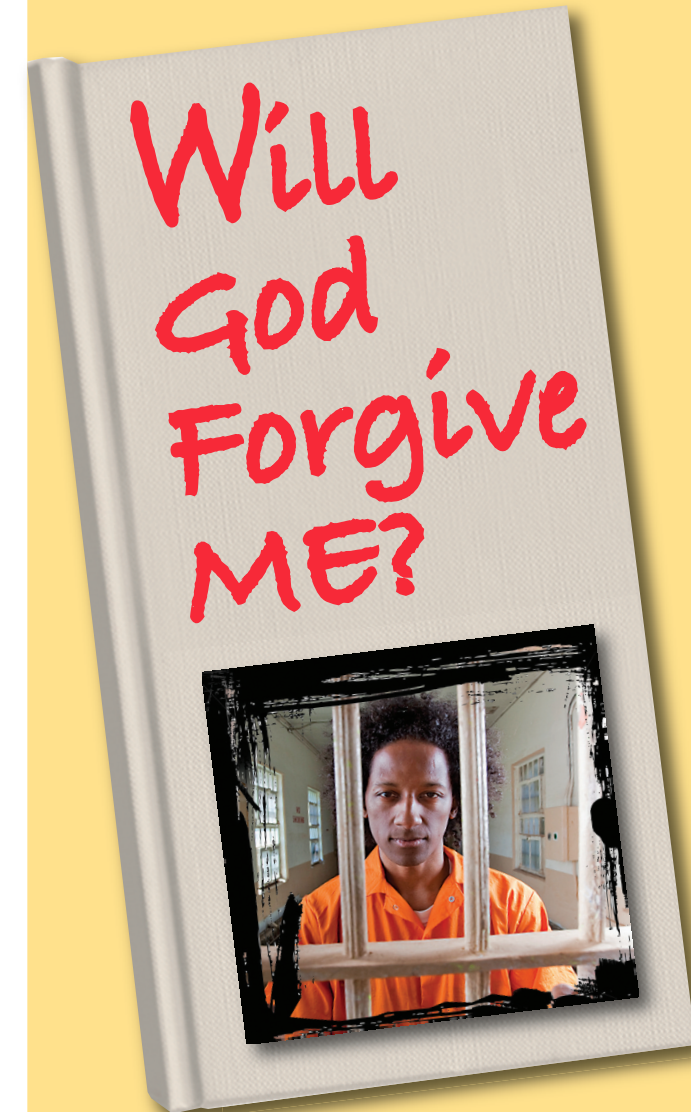
Dr. Barnes' mission in life is to help the hurting, give hope to the hopeless, and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with all who will listen.

Compliments of:

Bible Translations:

NIV – New International Version;
NKJV – New King James Version;
NLT – New Living Translation

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