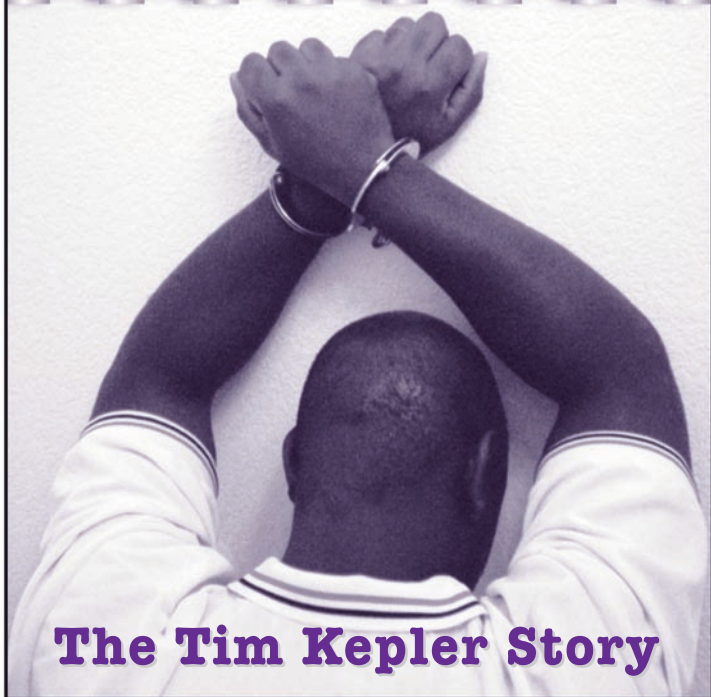


# FROM FOLSOM TO FORGIVEN



**The Tim Kepler Story**

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## The Tim Kepler Story

Not in my worst nightmare did I ever dream I would be sharing a 10-foot by 10-foot cell in Folsom State Prison with a man convicted of murder. But there I was behind bars surrounded by nearly 4,000 inmates, some of whom had committed unspeakable crimes.

My story is not unique; in fact, it is unfortunately all too common in the world today. However, the ending is full of hope, and hope is in reality more important than any amount of money or drugs. Wherever you're at today, sitting behind bars, running the streets or just thinking about whether to get high or not, do yourself a big favor—read on.

## The Beginning Of The End

Looking back, I was blessed while growing up. Although I was adopted, I had good solid parents who loved my three brothers and me. They knew without a doubt that my greatest love was music and they encouraged me to sing. We even went to church faithfully every Sunday. My dad was a schoolteacher and a great role model and was solid as a rock. But in the 10th grade my “rock” was gone—my dad died suddenly of a massive heart attack.

From that point on, my life turned upside down. I started ditching school and smoking lots of pot. Soon, my smoking turned into dealing. Church was a memory, although every time I would drive by one I'd feel some sort of guilt. I didn't feel too guilty of course because I was driving my new Porsche, buying all the latest music equipment, wearing expensive clothes and jewelry, usually with a beautiful woman by my side. Frankly, I had it going on—until I was busted.

The cop who arrested me basically slapped me on the wrist and I was

only fined and given community service. Of course, that wasn't about to stop me, so I kept on smoking and selling. It was about nine years of the "good" life, or so I thought, until that same police officer arrested me again—but let me go! You'd think I'd stop and count my blessings, but the worst was yet to come.

## Up In Smoke

I said goodbye to all my friends and family because I discovered a new "friend" that was jealous for all of my attention—cocaine.

In six months, smoking crack cocaine was my life. I was possessed and I was homeless! No more fast cars, fast women and life in the fast lane. I pawned or sold everything expensive that I owned. I wandered the streets of Riverside, California for months looking for my next fix and sleeping in cockroach-infested abandoned buildings or in crack houses. You would think I would have come to my senses, but I didn't. Nothing mattered but getting high.

## "You'll Be Back"

This insanity continued and I was finally arrested and sent to the Riverside County Jail, then to Chino State Prison and ultimately on to Folsom. It was in prison that I became determined to do my time and never come back. I started reading the Bible again and counted the days until my release. When that day did arrive, I was given \$200 gate money and a bus ride to Riverside. As we were lined up to leave, the prison guard left me with a promise, "You'll be back."

I was terrified that the guard might be right. So what did I do once those prison bars closed behind me? Did I go to church? Did I try to reunite with my family? I went straight to a drug dealer and spent all the money I had. As the Bible says, "the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

My flesh was beyond weak! I hated my life and myself. It couldn't get any worse, or could it?

## Desperate To Change

I was still homeless. Many nights, I'd cry myself to sleep after a day of doing the very thing I hated—drugs. Even after I failed a drug test for my probation officer with his warning “the next ‘dirty’ test and you're going back to prison”—I wouldn't stop doing drugs!

Yet, my parole officer showed me mercy and took me to a homeless shelter that was part of a local church. The “New Jerusalem Foursquare Church” in Riverside became my new home and family. I started going to their church services and even started singing in the choir.

It's here in my story that I'd like to say that I finally got my life together. I'm ashamed to say I didn't. You see, I wanted desperately to change, but couldn't. Even while going to church, singing in the choir, raising my hands to Jesus—I was still doing drugs! Would God turn His back on me? I wouldn't blame Him if He did.

## Fateful Step

I was headed in the right direction for once in my life, attending church and trying to work on my problems. Like most addicts, I was a master of deception and had told no one at church about my secret drug addiction. But, like many church-goers who think they can somehow hide their real issues and struggles from God, I went up to my pastor for prayer—not to ask God for what I really needed, being freed from drugs, but to pray for something less embarrassing—a job. But when I told the pastor that I needed a job, he placed his hands on my head and simply prayed, “Lord, deliver this brother from drugs.” After he finished praying I felt like hiding, and I was embarrassed and humiliated. I was found out! Yet

God met me right where I was at. He exposed me because He loved me. From the moment that pastor prayed that prayer, the urge for drugs was completely gone! A miracle? Beyond question—I have been completely free of drugs now for 12 years. The healing power of Jesus Christ changed my life!

## **The Beginning Of A New Chapter**

God knew my need and never gave up on me. A week after my deliverance, I was drug tested again and if I had not been set free of my addiction I would have been sent back to Folsom and probably would still be serving time today.

God changed my destiny. I was forgiven and cleansed—a new man. The Bible says, “If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has passed away and the new has come.” (II Corinthians 5:17)

With forgiveness comes responsibility. I was clean from drugs, but I still had to get beyond homelessness and joblessness. I met a very special friend at church who had reached out to others in need in the community. After hearing my story, she wanted to help me get my life back on track. She believed in the healing power of Jesus and knew there was hope and a future for me, no matter what I did in the past. She believed in Jesus and in me. Our friendship quickly blossomed into romance, and we were soon married. I owned no worldly possessions and didn't even have a steady job. All I could offer in marriage was love—for Jesus Christ and for her.

## **Freedom Is Hard Work**

I worked at temporary jobs, from unloading furniture to construction. It was a struggle. Nothing came easy. I managed to get hired installing pipeline, where the hours were long and the work was very



hard. But I never once had the desire to go back to the easy drug money of the past. In my spare time, I composed, sang and played music on my wife's piano. I began singing for free and giving my testimony at churches in the area on evenings and weekends. I finally scraped the money together and bought a keyboard. I was in for a big shock—all the technology was new and everything was computerized. Having never touched a computer before, I started from scratch, reading the manuals and paying for private tutoring. At the same time, by faith, I started my own home improvement business, beginning at the bottom, from changing light bulbs to tenant clean-up. I bought cassette tapes and studied for the contractor's test. God blessed my businesses. My painting business grew from simply painting over graffiti until I was working on million-dollar homes. While continuing to sing, I invested every spare dollar in recording equipment. I was determined to have my own studio, sing and produce my own CD.

## Today And Forever

Today, my wife and I own a new home and have two beautiful, intelligent sons who love the Lord. God has also allowed me to do that which I believe He always wanted me to do – sing for His Glory. I own my own record company and produce other Christian groups. I've been able to tour the United States and even go overseas, ministering both in churches and prisons. Why do I tell you this? Do I deserve some kind of praise? I was and am completely lost without Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. He gave me my life back and set me free. I'm writing my story for you because I know without a doubt that you too can experience the healing and cleansing of Jesus Christ. Let me share with you how:

**First**, admit that you have sinned against God and confess your sins to Him. The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (Romans 3:23)

**Second**, understand that Jesus lived a sinless life, died on a cross and rose again from the grave to save you from those sins. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us... We have now been justified by his blood...” (Romans 5:8,9)

**Third**, receive by faith the free gift of mercy and grace God gives you through Jesus His Son. “For by grace you have been saved through faith and not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8)

**Fourth**, it all begins by simply talking to God. Pray something like this:

*“Dear Jesus, I have sinned against You. I believe You are the Son of God and I need Your grace and forgiveness today. I trust not in myself but in You alone to cleanse me and make me a new person. Thank You for dying on a cross to forgive all of my sins and for rising again to give me a new life. Amen.”*

**Fifth**, ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit so that you might have the power to live a clean and good life for Him. “For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that you should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)

**Sixth**, find and commit to a group of other believers. Study God’s Word and pray daily. Share your faith and the love of God with others.

May God bless you and keep you!

Your new brother in Christ,

*Tim*

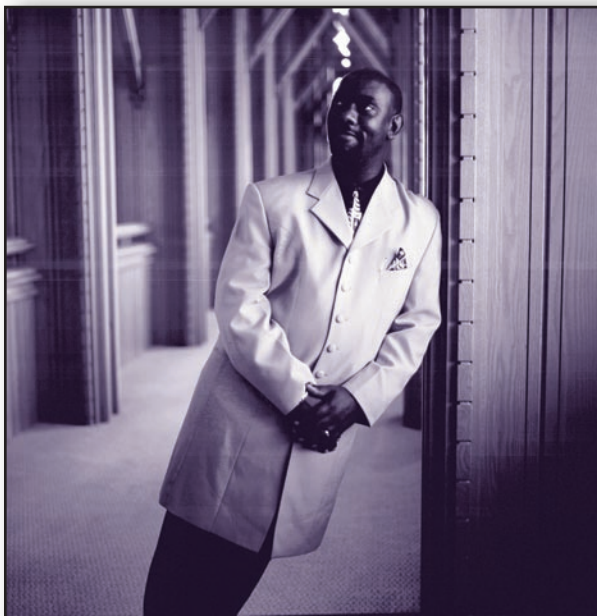
Tim currently attends the Cornerstone Foursquare Church in Anaheim, California, where he is a leader in their Praise & Worship team. Tim's music is available on CD, including "From Folsom To Forgiveness." He is also available for ministry –

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