

## Tom Hooper

I was an average kid, adopted at 5 days old, so the only parents I have known are those that raised me. I guess I always wanted to belong somewhere, so I usually identified with the bad side, hung around with the tough guys and girls. Gangs, drugs, sex, partying, being popular were my main focus. Even though I was given love, care, and a nice home, I still began, at an early age, a downward route. A route that was to take me from stealing, rebelling, lying, loving the gang world, worshiping the "bad guys" (they were the tough guys, the smart guys, the ones to be respected), glue sniffing, drinking, gang fights and warfare, being picked up for carrying a deadly weapon, to really going heavy with the drugs. The motorcycle gangs, such as the Hells Angels were my idols.

I guess I heard about Jesus since I could remember, but I didn't come from a churchy home. It was not until I was about 22 years old that Jesus became real to me. I had tried to commit suicide by overdosing on drugs, but before I went through with it, I cried out to God, "If You are real, reveal Yourself to me, and give me a reason for living!" I went into the bedroom to get everything ready to overdose on heroin, but the spoon flipped out of my hand, and fell behind the dresser. When I went to move the dresser, a dusty Bible was there. God DID reveal Himself to me, as I began reading the Bible I had miraculously found. Shortly after that, I gave my life to Christ, and began serving Him.

Unfortunately, I tried serving Him in the power of my own flesh, and when that didn't work, I got discouraged. I fell away from the Lord for a few years, and went back to the drugs, partying, and hanging out with my biker buddies. I finally re-committed my life to Jesus after hearing the testimony of another heroin addict at my wife's church. I thought, "If the Lord can clean up this guy's life, He can clean up mine!" - and He did. I got active in serving the Lord, and eventually became a deacon in the church. I served on the board of deacons at my church for several years, but had to resign when I lost control of my family (my wife left me, taking our two teenage daughters with her). My Bible says that if a man does not have control over his own house, he should not be part of governing God's house.

Things got worse, and ended in a very hurtful divorce after 23 years of marriage. I got bitter, and after a while I stopped reading my Bible, stopped praying, and stopped going to church. That led to many years of non-productive carnality. In 1995, I had two strokes (while using speed) that left me partially paralyzed on the left side, and I had to teach myself to walk, talk, and read all over again, over a long period of time. The depression that followed the strokes was probably worse than the physical damage, though, and I became a complete drunk and recluse. Then, in early 1998, when leaving the house to go get more booze, I fell in the street, and I lay completely broken in the gutter in front of my house for hours. The Lord gave me some godly flashbacks: I thought about all the good times, such as teaching Sunday school and Bible study, taking tough gang bangers back- packing (and baptizing nine of them in a mountain stream), counseling, winning souls for Christ. I cried out to God that I wished I could do those things of service for Him again that I once loved, or else that He would just take me home. I just wanted to die - I saw no light at the end of the tunnel, but I said, "Lord, if You can use me, just pick me up and use me. I'm tired of making wrong decisions - I give my free will up to You!" Oh, how I praise Him! Somehow, God gave me the strength to pull myself up, and I went in the house and found my Bible and started reading it. My Lord picked up all of the brokenness I had become and didn't try to repair it. Thank God, He is not a repairman, but He created a completely new man in Christ Jesus, because He is the Creator. He has restored every hope and dream that I could ever imagine by giving me a ministry where the wreckage of my life is now being used to help and give hope to others through a Christ-centered 12-Step recovery ministry. The name of our ministry is "Love Lifted Me Recovery Ministries" because it was God's love that lifted me up out of the gutter and up out of my sin.