

Facing Mistakes, Finding New Hope



NONE OF US LIKE ADMITTING THAT WE'VE MADE MISTAKES OR BAD DECISIONS. We may see it as a sign of weakness or an acknowledgment that we are not perfect. But the truth is: we aren't perfect, and we're just fooling ourselves if we go through life with the mindset that we can do no wrong. With humility and God's grace, however, we can recognize and acknowledge when we've gone down the wrong path so we can move toward the brighter future that God has in store for us.

MLB Player Turns Life Around

When Clint Hurdle was drafted by Major League Baseball's Kansas City Royals in 1975, his future as a player appeared promising. His sense of humor and affable personality made him well-liked by his fellow players and coaches—and by March 1978, he made the cover of *Sports Illustrated* with the headline "This Year's Phenom." Sadly, Hurdle never lived up to that early potential. Part of the reason, he now admits, was that he became an alcoholic. He was also unable to make a relationship work and wound up with two failed marriages.

Though Clint was raised as a Christian, he spent his early baseball years treating Jesus like "an ATM card." He would call on Him when he needed help—and put Him aside when things were going well. But truthfully, things were never really "going well." It just took a long time for Clint to admit that to himself.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview about his book *Hurdle-isms: Wit and Wisdom from a Lifetime in Baseball*, he explained, "There's two kinds of people in this world: those who are humble and those who are about to be...There was a time when I was full of myself...but I had my ego kicked out of me on the field from a talent base, from a marital base...I had two DUIs about nine years apart...and then I had two divorces. I wasn't fired from any jobs for that, but maybe I was less than what I could have been at the jobs I had."

"Everybody's bottom is different," Clint continued, "but when I hit that last bottom, I just knew that my life had become unmanageable. This wasn't going to work anymore. I actually made a list of things I needed to improve upon. On the top was, rededicate my life to Christ. The second was, get sober."

And so, at 40+ years of age, Clint followed through on both those goals. He is now 26 years sober, and his faith sits at the center of his life—though the journey was not always easy. Clint admits that "surrendering" to God did not come naturally to him. He would often say to God, "Thy will be done. But can we do it my way?"

Two Brothers, Two Choices

Many years ago, the publication *Bits and Pieces* shared a story about two brothers convicted of stealing sheep. As punishment, the letters ST, for Sheep Thief, were branded on their foreheads. One brother couldn't stand the shame. He moved away, but wherever he went, he was asked about the letters and what they meant. Eventually, he became embittered and died a lonely forgotten man.

But the other brother stayed put. "I can't run away from my past," he reasoned, "but I can try and win back the respect that I once had." This brother began to build a reputation for kindness and fair dealing. He went out of his way to be friendly and helpful. Years later, he was a revered member of the community. One day, a stranger came to town and asked a villager about the letters on the old man's forehead. The villager said, "It happened a long time ago. I've forgotten the details. But the letters are an abbreviation for saint."

Clint reflected, "Once I laid it down—and [was] thankful and grateful that I'm still alive, that I have an opportunity to be a better man today than I was yesterday, and focused on serving others—things turned around...Not overnight, but the last 26 years, the things that have happened to me, I could never have [thought]...I'm going to be blessed this way...I've been married for 26 years. We have wonderful children. I've managed two Major League teams for 17 years."

A while back, Clint started saying a prayer every day asking for even greater transformation: "Lord, help me become a simple person in a complex world." Why is that prayer important—and how can it help others as well?

Clint concluded, "I need to be a simple man, to do what's next, what's right in front of me, make my next good choice...I don't have to worry about what's going to happen two weeks from now. I've got to take care of today...I need to be a good friend, good father, good brother, good servant of Jesus, good husband. That's going to keep me full today."

Prisoner Seeks New Life

Nancy grew up with an unstable home life. As a teen, she acted out in ways that got her expelled from school and sent to juvenile hall. An addiction to drugs soon followed, as did single motherhood. By the time Nancy was 21, she had three children.

She tried treatment programs, but continued to spiral downward, eventually leaving her children in the care of family and friends. By the time Nancy received a six-year prison sentence for robbery and drug possession, she had already been an addict for 14 years. The troubled young woman prayed, "Lord, please help me, because I can't do this to myself anymore."

After being sent to Coffee Creek Correctional Facility near Portland, Oregon, Nancy began attending church services where volunteers from Prison Fellowship reflected Jesus' love to her. "Nobody wanted anything to do with me before I went to prison because I was so far out there on drugs," Nancy told Prison Fellowship's Emily Andrews. "I wanted to have a new life and be a new creation. That's why I wanted to start going to church...I just wanted to know [God]."

That embrace of faith noticeably changed Nancy's mood to the point that her fellow inmates commented on it. She told them, "I'm happy I'm alive. I made it out of almost death, and I'm the Lord's child now. I'm His daughter."

Nancy was released from prison in 2010 and went on to live in a couple of halfway houses while seeking work with the help of an employment agency. Due to her criminal record, however, nobody would hire her. Thankfully, her brother, Joseph, supported Nancy through every challenge,

which allowed her to attend college and graduate with a business degree.

She "began working at a call center and became the top member of her sales team." Then, she and Joseph opened a gym franchise together, which they still co-own. Nancy also helped found Opportunity Oregon, an agency that finds jobs for people with criminal records. She is forging new bonds with her children as well.

Nancy concluded, "I was at my most vulnerable, darkest, worst, hardest part of my life, and I was just looking for somewhere to turn...I was able to have that start inside of the walls because of Prison Fellowship, and I am forever grateful."

A Career Change for the Better

John Kennedy Bingham grew up in a big Irish-Catholic family devoted to faith and service. While attending St. John's University in Queens, New York—a school grounded in the mission of St. Vincent de Paul—he twice served as President of Student Government while personifying "the Vincentian charism of service to the poor and marginalized," said Dr. Patricia A. Whitely, who was his Vice President at the time.

After graduating, John took a job at a prestigious financial firm and began working his way up the corporate ladder. But this was the 1980s, when the "greed is good" philosophy permeated much of Wall Street. When John uncovered an insider trading scandal at the company, his morals and

"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

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faith prompted him to expose it. This experience also revealed to him that his career choice had been a mistake. His true passion lay elsewhere.

As reported by *St. John's Magazine*, John "suddenly gave up everything, quit his job, and announced that he was headed to Thailand to work as a \$248-a-month Catholic Church volunteer with his uncle [and namesake], the Jesuit missionary [Rev. John Kennedy Bingham], to assist refugees from Cambodia's 'Killing Fields.'...John spent the next eight years teaching human rights and criminal justice in a refugee camp of 240,000 Cambodians in Thailand, and later business law at the university in Phnom Penh."

While working in the refugee camps, John met the woman who would become his wife, Agnes, and they would go on to have four sons. They moved back to Long Island, New York, after eight years, and John began working for the Catholic Church and Catholic Charities on behalf of immigrants and refugees.

Following John's death in 2022, he was remembered as having always been a man on a mission. His classmate, Salvatore Barcia, R.Ph., reflected, "[John's] decision to volunteer in the Cambodian refugee camps reminds me of Jesus' gospel encounter with the rich young man. Unlike the young man, who could not eschew his wealth to follow Jesus, John literally gave away his suits and headed off to a life of service."

John Kennedy Bingham's life ended sooner than expected, but he had made the most of his years thanks to the course correction he made in his career, which changed him—and the world—for the better.

"Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

—Philippians 3:13-14