

Personal Testimony: Lance Kerwin

Story by Tom Price

From Child Star to God's Child

I was on the verge of total ruin, in the midst of the assembly and congregation. Proverbs 5:14

Former teenage Hollywood icon and star of the 1970s hit TV series and movie *James at 15*, Lance Kerwin remembers the gold-paved road that led him into an addictive lifestyle. Now he encourages those with addicted loved ones by sharing the profoundly simple verse, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

"All I needed all along was Jesus. Unfortunately, I didn't realize that until all I had left to turn to was Jesus," said Lance Kerwin, now age 47 and director of U-Turn for Christ on Kauai, one of the Hawaiian Islands. Speaking of his slide into drug addiction and the years he spent hooked on crack cocaine, Lance commented, "Only having a personal relationship and obedience to Jesus Christ as your Savior will truly free you from an addictive lifestyle."

Growing Up on TV

The Newport Beach, CA, native began performing after his mother took him to her acting class. The little boy surprised everyone with his natural ability. After two years of doing TV commercials, Lance landed roles in several well-known television series, including *Little House on the Prairie*, *Cannon*, *Wonder Woman*, *Gunsmoke*, *Emergency*, *The Bionic Woman*, and several TV movies. One movie made for television documented the trials of a 15-year-old adolescent moving to another state. It led to the popular TV show *James at 15* in which Lance also starred until it ended after a two-year run. His likable boy-next-door image was featured on numerous teen magazines, posters, and even lunch boxes.

In contrast to his TV persona, Lance's home life included casual use of marijuana from his early years through adolescence. Later the teenager's successful career began to fade as it became more difficult to conceal his addiction to crack cocaine. Though he went through secular addiction programs,

he was finally arrested for possession several years later at age 29. Trying to escape the Hollywood lifestyle, he retreated to Maui, one of the Hawaiian Islands.

Struggle for Sobriety

Though he tried to stay sober and clean, and even went to churches in Maui, he still battled his addictions: "I was living in a beautiful place but living an ugly life." During his first residence there in the early 1990s, Lance accepted Christ as his Savior during one of his bouts of sobriety. But he lacked the strength and freedom that comes from growing and walking with the Lord in obedience to Him.



Lance Kerwin, then and now

"I was like a chameleon," offered Lance. "I had my church friends, my Alcoholics Anonymous friends, and other friends that I should not have had." Hawaii's party lifestyle proved too much of a temptation for an addict. Lance and his girlfriend had a daughter in 1994 and later split up. Realizing his inability to overcome his addictions, Lance moved with his daughter to the U-Turn ranch in Perris, CA, where he was able to shake off his addictions by wholeheartedly turning his life over to Jesus Christ.

Not only did Lance complete the program and stay clean, but he also began to hearten others. "There I could see where God was even using my past failures to encourage men who were struggling, as it says in Romans," he said.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28

Lance later became the overseer of the ranch at Perris, CA, from 1997 until 2000. He served in youth ministry at CC Temecula and then worked at Calvary Chapel's property at Twin Peaks. U-Turn founder and director, Pastor Gerry Brown felt Lance was called to start and lead the new U-Turn program in Hawaii. Lance knows firsthand that addiction is not an easy pit to climb from, and that it requires a no-compromise attitude toward sin.

"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell." Matthew 5:29

"The U-Turn program is a rough, confrontational, and highly-disciplined ministry," added Lance. "My heart's desire is fulfilled as I have witnessed the Lord transform former addicts into missionaries, pastors, and evangelists who share the hope they now have in Christ." Lance and his wife, Yvonne, moved to Kauai with their daughters in 2006 to begin the ministry. Lance rented several trailers and began building the facility with the help of those in the program.

Right before moving to Hawaii to start the ministry, Lance had the opportunity to appear on a nationally televised entertainment show. The host asked, "What was the greatest thing to happen to you? Was it a movie, or your TV series, or winning an Emmy award?"

Without hesitation, Lance replied, "No, the greatest thing has been giving my life to Jesus Christ and being allowed to serve Him." When the program aired, Lance was happy to see that his testimony had stayed in the segment and was broadcast around the country. ↻

As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. Proverbs 27:17