

# From Gangs to God's Grace

Story by Sandy Hodges



It was a Wednesday night at CC Chino Valley, CA, when a young man sauntered in wearing oversized pants, a huge white T-shirt, and Converse sneakers. The message was about Jesus Christ's crucifixion and suffering, and the 19-year-old was David Trujillo. Hearing that Jesus was spit upon and did not avenge Himself inspired David, who grew up in gangs where vengeance reigned supreme and people were shot for less. "Hey, Lord, that's cool what You did," David prayed. "I still want to party, drink, and be with girls, but if You can change me, give me a sign." The pastor, David Rosales, invited anyone who wanted to become a Christian to approach the altar, and David went forward with a friend.

At the age of 9, David had asked God never to leave him, but he spent the next decade defying Him. "A lot of things had made me angry and bitter," David said. Although his parents were Christians and he attended church at a young age, David sought acceptance from neighborhood gangs. When his mom was diagnosed with a mental illness, he delved further into a life of immorality, self destruction, and bitterness toward God. "Eventually, I didn't care anymore." However, "through a lot of situations God would speak to me and tell me He loved me."

One day, a rival gang member put an AK-47 to David's chest and tried pulling the trigger. When the gun didn't fire, David assumed it was fake. "I didn't know the gun was real and God had His finger on the trigger, not letting him pull." Another time, after unloading a gun, setting it down, and walking away, David later returned to play Russian roulette. He didn't realize that in the meantime his brother-in-law, unaware of David's intention, had reloaded the gun. David lifted the gun to his temple and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. As he kept squeezing, he heard his brother-in-law yelling, "No!" The gun fired and the booming noise knocked David out of his chair and onto the floor. "By God's grace, my brother-in-law hit my hand, and the gun raised and shot the ceiling. I could've been

in hell." Despite many close encounters, David continued a life filled with violence.

"One year, I lost 17 friends," David lamented. When David was released from jail, he found that drugs, girls, and hanging out with friends appealed to him most. But when his best friend, Henry, told David that he had heard about Christ and begged him to go to church with him, David reluctantly agreed. "First, let's drive to the neighborhood," David said. There, another gang began shooting at

with him. That night in 1993, David's life changed. "For the first time, I felt the burden lifted." He began preaching the Gospel and in 1995 started a Bible study in the gang-dominated city where he grew up. The study later became CC South Los Angeles.

When David's brother almost died from a gunshot wound in 1997, David struggled with wanting to kill the man who shot him. Two years later, David and others from church were playing basketball at a park

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them. Henry shouted, "Take off! Take off!" Sharp pricks of glass hit David in the back of the head, and he suddenly realized he no longer heard Henry shouting. Turning, he saw that Henry had been shot in the head. Panicked, David screamed, "No! How dare You!" Anger welled up inside him. David blamed God, "That was my best friend, and You took him from me." Henry's death impacted David deeply as Henry had previously prevented David from shooting his own father. "Henry snatched the gun from me and talked sense into me."

Bitterness grew inside David as he saw his mom's mental health fade, felt his dad was unconcerned, and watched his brothers submerge themselves in drug and gang culture.

When he was 19, David's family moved to Chino Valley. There, they met Robert Garcia, who persistently called and told them about God. One day, Robert visited their house and listened to David and his friends, giving biblical answers to their many questions. David became jealous when he saw Robert talking to his girlfriend and told him to leave. Robert left only after David agreed to go to church

when David's brother pointed out the man who shot him. David approached the man intending to hurt him, but surrendered to God. "Jesus loves you, and we forgive you," David told him. Returning to his friends, David said, "This is what it means to love your enemy." It was two more years before David realized the impact of his decision. He saw the man again; he had become a Christian and was moving to El Salvador as a missionary.

*"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." Matthew 5:44*

Today, "My heart is for the lost," David said. CC South Los Angeles reaches teens by holding concerts at local schools where they preach the Gospel, and hosting events like the Hear His Voice outreach on August 20th.

David sees his life as a testimony of God's glory and honor. "I'm just here to share how good, awesome, and powerful God is." ✨