

To my dear Brother John Clayton

April 12, 2025

I have followed your work for God through your "Does God Exist" ministries since the early 1990s when you came twice to Mt. Pleasant, Texas for the North Ridge Church of Christ; once holding a special program for youth at our civic center. I can not begin to tell you what an enormous influence you have been in my families' life since those days.

I am not a writer nor speaker but after your article entitled "Life Is Hard, But There Is Hope" on page 6 in the Fourth Quarter 2024 issue of Does God Exist, I felt compelled to affirm, through a personal life experience, how true a couple of your statements in that article really are for Christians today. (1) "The most fundamental reason for this dilemma is that there is no purpose in living for those who reject the teachings of Christ and the Bible." (2) "Romans 8:28 tells us that God will take the awful things in life and make good things come from them. Sometimes, those good things are spiritual, which is what life is about."

The important thing I wanted to tell you is not about the murder of our daughter Carla while she was a student at Harding University, but the great spiritual awakening God brought about in the lives of the two murders following a few words of forgiveness by my wife and I. The story is too long to write here but if you would like to hear it you can google my talk at Harding University Chapel 4/10/2019. The rest of the story is what is so amazing.

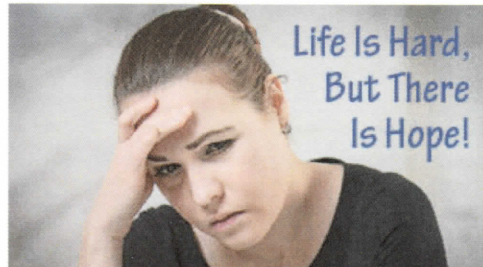
After 20 years my wife and I wrote a few words of forgiveness to each man, not really expecting a response from either. We told them that there was a much greater forgiveness available to them and if they were interested in obtaining that forgiveness I would be willing to study the Bible with them through correspondence. Surprisingly both men, who were in separate prisons and had not seen or spoken to each other, responded in almost the same unbelief but said they would study with me. With the help of other prison ministers, both were baptized into Christ and in the ten years since, both have taught everyone who would listen; resulting in baptisms of 17 fellow inmates to date. Both continue to write us every two weeks with words of praise and thanksgiving for their new way of life in Christ Jesus. One, Mitchell Skinner, is a very good artist and ask for help to set up a scholarship at Harding in Carla's name supported through sales of his art work. That scholarship is now fully funded with over \$50,000. The show of repentance and gratitude for salvation in Jesus Christ from both men is remarkable. In closing I want to enclose a copy of Mitchell's testimony at prison chapel about forgiving the man that killed his brother. The killer was the father of his daughter-in-law. It is a powerful story about how God has truly changed Mitchell's heart and given him, as he likes to say, "a better way of life".

Thank you again for your many years of outstanding labor for our God and his Son Jesus the Christ.

*In the love of Christ*  
*Roy Willmon*



[Return to 4th Quarter 2024 articles.](#)



Life is hard. I doubt that anyone would argue with that. Jesus knew about this and spoke of it. In [Matthew 24:4-9](#), Jesus told his disciples, "Watch out that no one deceives you ... you will hear of wars and rumors of wars ... nation will rise against nation ... There will be famines and earthquakes ... you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me ... ." He goes on to say that scammers will be present, and the love of many will grow cold. Non-Christians will view those words of Jesus as a reason to reject Christianity.

Many of today's issues are rooted in the fact that life is hard. Life challenges can lead to suicide, prostitution, drug use, alcoholism, and mental illnesses. The most fundamental reason for this dilemma is that there is no purpose in living for those who reject the teachings of Christ and the Bible.

Beginning in the book of Genesis, the Bible presents the theme that a war is going on between good and evil. It starts in the Garden of Eden and is portrayed in the Book of Job. The New Testament clearly defines the conflict. [Ephesians 6:12](#) tells us, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against ... the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms." [Ephesians 3:9-12](#) explains the purpose of the church in this war. Atheism dodges the issue of evil by simply denying that it exists, but reality says otherwise.

Yes, life is hard, but for Christians, life is the worst thing you will ever have to face. [Romans 8:28](#) tells us that God will take the awful things in life and make good things come from them. Sometimes, those good things are spiritual, which is what life is about. Do not defeat the purpose of your existence by denying the reality of the spiritual warfare in life.

— [John N. Clayton](#)

**Picture credits:**

© Dorieugene/Bigstock.com

Scripture links/references are from BibleGateway.com. Unhighlighted scriptures can be looked up at their [website](#).

[Return to 4th Quarter 2024 articles.](#)

[www.doesgodexist.org](http://www.doesgodexist.org)

Header photo: NASA  
12/26/2024



GIVEN TO PRISON CHAPLAIN WHO GAVE IT TO ME

Ray Willmon 7/18/2019

"A TESTIMONY FROM MITCHELL SKINNER"

pg. 1

7-5-19

I've been locked up now for twenty-four years on a life without parole sentence. When I first came down I was bitter and I felt like I didn't deserve the sentence I was given because I didn't murder anyone. In fact, I'm the one who came to the police station and told them what I had witnessed, which led to the arrest of my fall partner, Patric Patterson. I knew I would receive some prison time for being with Patric but to be given a sentence equal to his bothered me and that bitterness changed me into someone that most people didn't like. Heck, I didn't even like myself. I'm sure some of you have felt the same way at some time in your lives. Life isn't fair. It sure wasn't fair for Carla Willmon, the Harding College student who was murdered at the age of twenty-one.

Seven years later, in 2002, my only brother was murdered. Now I knew first hand the pain of loss from a violent act. It tore my family apart. We couldn't even mention my brother's name for many years without breaking down in tears. I promised my brother's two sons, at their Dad's funeral, that I would get this guy, Ricky Taylor, when he came to prison and I able to run into him. But God must've been looking out for him... and me because he only did seven years in prison and he did all seven at the Waightsville Unit. A prison I could never go to because of my life sentence. Oh yeah, I almost forgot to mention that

Ricky Taylor is my son's father-in-law. My son's wife is this man's daughter!

When I had first gotten the news about my brother being killed, "Skinner! They want you at the Chaplain's Office," (You all know the drill. It's never good news) I said some things that I shouldn't have, when allowed to make a couple of calls. I basically told April, my son's wife, that I had nothing against her but her father is mine when he comes to prison. She's the mother of my four grandchildren and because of this tragedy, and the comments I made, I had never met any of them. Not only did I lose a brother, I lost a son and my grandchildren. I was getting reports from my parents that my son and his family were visiting Ricky Taylor on a regular basis. That bothered me a great deal. I started telling people that I didn't have a son. The weight of the world was pressing down on me pretty hard.

Then, one night in 2014, I received a letter from someone in Texas. Texas? I don't know anyone in Texas. When I opened it, and started reading, I realized what I held in my hands. I couldn't believe my eyes. It was a letter of forgiveness from the victims family. How could they forgive me when I couldn't forgive myself? Well, as I read further, Ray Willman gave me the answer. He quoted a scripture from Matthew 6:14-15, "For if you ~~don't~~ forgive men ~~the~~ ~~when~~ they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you.



But if you do not forgive men their sins, your father will not forgive your sins." This man, and his wife, through their willingness to surrender their own emotions to serve a loving God, put God's love in action and wrote to me offering their forgiveness which had a life changing effect on me. All of a sudden I didn't feel so alone in the world. These people showed me that God's love is real. I wanted what this man was demonstrating. It was so powerful to me that I couldn't contain my excitement. That's the power of God's love. You have to tell others about it. Everyone I spoke to were just as amazed as I was.

As I continued to write and receive letters from Roy Willmon, he taught me what I must do to be saved. It wasn't long after that I was baptized. I felt the need to write a letter to Ricky Taylor, the man who murdered my only brother in 2002. I wanted him to feel the love of God as I had and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. I also wrote to my son's wife explaining how forgiveness changed my life and how I wanted to show that same love and concern to her Dad. Those letters opened up communication between us which led to visits with my son and his family. That's the power that forgiveness holds. It changes lives, it brings families back together. I'm a living witness that God can take a bad situation and make something bloom from it.

While nailed to the cross, Jesus asked his father to forgive us. If we're in Christ we should learn to surrender self and allow the love of Christ to work in and through us.

May the love of Christ and his forgiveness be with you. And if you're not in Christ, may the Holy Spirit lead you to him and show you a more abundant way of living.