

Keep Hope Alive: *Your life story is not done!*

Recently, we have seen surprises in the arena of sports. For example, the Cleveland Cavaliers won the NBA championship in the 2016 finals by beating the favorite, the Golden State Warriors. The Cavaliers were down 3-1, but surprisingly overcame the deficit and won in an epic game seven. Many commentators had written them off, but the Cavaliers never lost hope, and NBA finals history had to be rewritten; they were the first team to come back from so far down to win the championship, and they gave the city of Cleveland its first major professional sports championship since 1964.

In the Bible, we read of people whose life stories changed instantly when they put their faith in God or when they had encounters with the Lord Jesus Christ:

Rahab was a harlot. If her story ended in Joshua chapter 2, you wouldn't be proud to have her in your family tree. Not only was she a harlot, but she hid the enemies of her people and deliberately lied about it. But we read in Matthew 1:5-6 that she was the great-great grandmother of King David, so she was in the lineage of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, she is named in Hebrews 11 as a member of the "hall of famers of faith" (Hebrews 11:31). James also said Rahab's work of lodging the spies and sending them off in a different direction was evidence of her righteous faith (James 2:25).

Paul the apostle did not begin well. He wrote that he was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, but was shown mercy (1 Timothy 1:13). He was present at the stoning of Stephen to death. On his way to Damascus to apprehend believers, he had an encounter with the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, and everything changed for good in his life. He became a strong witness for the Lord and an apostle, and he wrote about 30 percent of the New Testament. He established many churches and had numerous visions of heaven—all because he surrendered to the lordship of Christ Jesus when he had an

encounter with Him. Paul attributed the great things he did to the grace of God, and not his own work or goodness. He said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

The Samaritan woman had been married five times to different men. In her day, it was taboo. However, when she had an encounter with Jesus Christ at the well, her life story turned around: she instantly became an evangelist, proclaiming to her people that they should come to Jesus, and as a result many turned out to meet Him.

There are many people today whose lives have changed dramatically because of an encounter with Jesus Christ. You have probably read or heard the story of John Newton, who composed "Amazing Grace." He was a hardened trafficker of human beings. On May 10, 1748, as he was on a homeward voyage, steering his slave ship through a violent storm, he experienced what he referred to later as his "great deliverance." Just as it seemed that the ship would sink, Newton exclaimed, "Lord, have mercy upon us!" That night in his cabin, he reflected on what he had said, and began to

believe that God had addressed him through the storm and that grace had begun to work for him. John Newton later became a preacher and a composer.

Are you concerned with the way things are going in your life? Do you fear your life story will not end well? If so, remember Rahab, Paul, and John Newton, and be encouraged. Don't lose hope! God can take someone with a bad reputation and transform him or her into an example of His love and forgiveness. There is nothing too hard for God. However, you must do the following:

- Come to Jesus Christ. No matter what you have done, He will cleanse you of your sins. The Bible says: *"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool"* (Isaiah 1:18). Jesus equally said, *"The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out"* (John 6:37).
- Confess with your mouth and believe in your heart the Lord Jesus: *"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and*

believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

- Follow as He leads you by the Holy Spirit.
- Join a Bible-believing and Bible-teaching church that will help you in your spiritual growth.

—Philip O. Akinyemi