

Inmate turned playwright in his 'comeback season'

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Jamison Charles always considered himself a follower, and he “followed the crowd straight to prison,” receiving a 50-year sentence for eight felonies, he recalled.

But during his incarceration, he became a follower of Jesus Christ, and “tragedy turned to triumph,” he said.

“I hit rock bottom and found out God has an office there,” Charles told the No Need Among You Conference at the Gaston Christian Center in Dallas, an Oct. 23-25 event sponsored by the Texas Christian Community Development Network.

He entered the federal prison system at age 19 after being convicted for carjacking—his first offense.

“I lost all of my 20s, all of my 30s and half of my 40s” to incarceration, he said. “Prison is terrifying. For me, it was going from being around puppies to being around wolves.”

After serving time at the federal penitentiary in Leavenworth, Kan., Charles jumped at the opportunity to be transferred to the federal prison in Beaumont, near his mother and sister.

While he cherished their visits, he grew to recognize the toll his imprisonment took on his family.

“I realized I wasn’t the only one doing time,” he said. “That brought me to my first real conversation with God.”

‘I’m following the right one now’

Charles prayed, challenging God—if he really existed—to “show up” for him. If God responded, he promised to turn his life around.

“God called my bluff,” he testified.

Charles began attending chapel services at the prison—initially because the chapel was air-conditioned, he confessed. But those chapel experiences made an impact, and he enrolled in every available Bible study for the next eight years.

“I’m still a follower, but I’m following the right one now,” he said.

In one of those early Bible studies, Charles learned the first Scripture verse he committed to memory—Jeremiah 29:11. He wrote the verse on a paper he taped to the bottom of the bunk above his, so he would see it the first thing every morning and the last thing every night.

“I totally blew it, but God said, ‘I still have a plan for you.’ And I believed it,” he said.

Discovered a talent for writing

Charles also took every available class offered in prison. In one class, students were assigned to write about the most horrible thing that ever happened to them. Then the teacher challenged the inmates to write a happy ending to that narrative.

Charles fulfilled the assignment, and the teacher told him he had a gift for writing.

“I started writing every day,” he said.

He began working on a novel based on his own life experiences, and used that story as the basis for a skit that was presented in the prison chapel.

It was so well-received, prison officials encouraged him to develop the brief skit into a full stage play. He wrote the script, enlisted fellow inmates to play assigned roles, and presented the play to the whole prison population.

After he committed himself to using his writing talent for God’s glory—and after participating in a life-changing weekend sponsored by Kairos Prison Ministry—Charles characterized his last two years in prison as “beautiful.”

“I learned how to pray fervently,” he said.

‘Change the narrative of my life’

When he appeared for a parole hearing, Charles told the board if he was allowed to reenter the free world, “I want to change the narrative of my life.” ✖

“Now, I’m in my comeback season,” he said.

When he received an economic stimulus check, he used it to self-publish his novel, [*Saved-ish: Sometimes It’s Hell Gettin’ to Heaven*](#). At an early book-signing event, correctional officers from the unit where he was imprisoned stood in line to get their copy of the book autographed, he said.

The play based on that same story—which Charles wrote, produced and directed—premiered in March at the Jefferson Theater in Beaumont. It has also been performed in churches and will be presented Nov. 16 in [Killeen](#).

Charles believes audiences have responded favorably to the play not only because of its humor, but also because of its message of redemption.

A person’s value is not diminished just because they have been torn and

trampled, he insisted.

“Don’t you dare throw anybody away,” he said. “They are only one God-appointed moment away from changing everything.”