

THE Shepherd

Summer 2020

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. Luke 19:10

25th
YEAR
1996-2020

John Yi Chooses Life

"My conscience was exhausted. The world offered one way out for a rapist like me. In the woods behind my barracks, I placed a stepladder under a tree and tied a rope around my neck. Then, as I began to take that final step into eternity, a bright light shone out."

From John Yi's letter to Christian Library International

By Frank Sambrick

In a world filled with sin, there is no shortage of great sinners. John Yi is one such man. This is his story, as told in a letter to CLI.

I never knew who God was. For 13 years the army was my god. I was the obedient soldier. I carried out every order, rose through the ranks and became a leader of men. And then it was over. My career and my life were destroyed by one horrible, willful act. I was now a rapist. I did not deserve mercy or compassion or salvation. Yet, miraculously, I received all of these things because of an incredible prison ministry called Christian Library International. CLI helped me to see my need for the Savior, Jesus Christ. Their faithful ministry helped me come to terms with my own depravity so that God could begin to do a work in my life.

It would have been easy to blame my crimes on other people or difficult circumstances. Criminals are good at this. I could

blame my wife for having an affair while I was away serving my country. I could blame the drinking and the loneliness that led to an addiction to pornography. But the truth is that I alone was to blame. I had harmed an innocent young girl, leaving her with a scar that she would have to carry for the rest of her life.

My guilt was so overwhelming that I didn't want to live. My conscience was exhausted. The world offered one way out for a rapist like me. In the woods behind my barracks, I placed a stepladder under a tree and tied a rope around my neck. Then, as I began to take that final step into eternity, a bright light shone out. As its radiating beam penetrated the woods I became disoriented, at first believing that the MPs had come to arrest me. But there were no footsteps, no voices, only silence.

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John Yi Chooses Life



As I stood gazing into the light, the desire to end my life left me. I became transfixed on the beam that had frozen me, saving me from a cowardly death. The beam, it turns out, was from an abandoned fire station that had been closed for years. I had passed this building each night on my way home from work and it had always been empty and dark. And while I still

can't explain who or what could have caused that light to come on at the very moment that I needed a light to turn on in my life, I no longer need an explanation. For me, the light that came on that night was from my Savior, Jesus Christ, saving me from my own self-destruction.

Today, thanks to the Lord and to my friends at CLI, I am a new creature in Christ, forgiven, saved and truly renewed in spirit. I want to extend my deep gratitude to CLI for the prayers and the personal letters of encouragement, and also for the discipleship lessons. I have recently finished my final lesson. Most of all, thank you for your essential ministry to the imprisoned. You have helped so many lost souls like me to find the peace of Christ and your ministry has inspired me to begin a ministry of my own when my season behind bars is over. In closing, I would like to leave your readers with this verse from Ephesians 3, which has been so uplifting for me, "And may you have the power to understand as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is." It is because of that love that a sinner like me chose life.

Christ: Supreme, Significant and Sufficient

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. Colossians 1:15-16



Kathleen Skaar, Founder

Knowing Jesus is paramount to knowing God; He is the image of the invisible God. The fullness and totality of God dwells in Jesus. Jesus and God are one.

Knowing of Jesus is not the same as knowing Jesus. Knowing Jesus means that He lives in us by His Holy Spirit and leads us in the Father's will. God the Father's will is centered on the revelation and supremacy of His Son.

Everything we need to learn about Jesus is recorded in God's word. The entire Bible, Old and New Testaments, speaks of Christ's supremacy, significance and sufficiency. We study the Bible to make sure that we are worshipping Jesus, obeying His authority and depending on Him for everything.

As we meditate on Scripture, we understand God's plan is for everyone to know Jesus. God's desire becomes our desire. We want the truth of Jesus' birth, death and resurrection to be formed not only in our hearts, but in *all* hearts. We yearn for everyone to be saved and glorify God.

By your gifts of resources and time, you are making it possible for men and women to know Jesus. Through Christian books, Bibles, Bible studies, letters and gospel tracts, the supremacy of Jesus is being revealed. Last year 2,340 prison inmates invited Jesus into their lives as Savior and Supreme Leader.

This year, our 25th anniversary year, we are reaching out to our neighbor, Mexico, with the revelation of Jesus Christ. Our goal is to provide Bibles and Bible studies to inmates, similar to our ministry here. We are relying on Jesus to show us exactly how CLI will work in Mexico.

A couple of weeks before we left for Mexico, I received a phone call from Gafid in Mexico. He had been incarcerated in the U.S. and recently deported back to his country. He was calling to find out if he could continue our Bible study! We met with Gafid in Mexico City where he lives and we set up shop until we were called home by our State Department due to COVID-19.

Satan is dead set against the revelation of Jesus Christ. The devil doesn't want his captives set free in the U.S. or any country. This is war! So we must look to the Son and follow His light. He is supreme, significant and sufficient to overcome the enemy. Indeed, Jesus has already triumphed over the devil and his forces by the cross (Colossians 2:15).

Our power to defeat the evil forces in any area lies in our dependence on Christ and His supreme command and power. Therefore, let us depend on Jesus for everything! I pray we do. Amen.

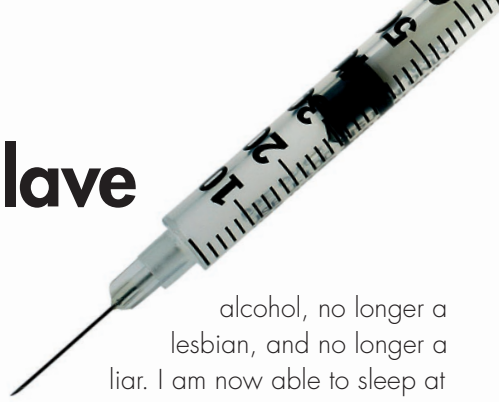
Please pray for our shared mission to Mexico. Thank you.

No Longer a Slave

By Maria (an inmate in Fort Worth, TX)

I was 35 years old when I tried to commit suicide and had just been released from a mental institution. I remember thinking, "Who am I?" That was a huge moment for me. I realized that I needed that moment to happen so that I could see more clearly. I had been living as a lesbian since I was 14 years old. I began drinking alcohol then, too. I became a heroin addict at age 25 and was diagnosed as bi-polar. In and out of jails and prisons, my life was spiraling out of control. I was lost and in a dark place.

I began searching for meaning. I knew something was missing from my life, and I needed to find it. I found God! I'll never forget the day I surrendered and gave my life to Him. I felt this huge burden lifted off of me. I am no longer on heroin or



alcohol, no longer a lesbian, and no longer a liar. I am now able to sleep at night knowing God has me. I wake up every morning thanking and praising Him for forgiving me. He gives me confidence to be a beautiful woman of God.

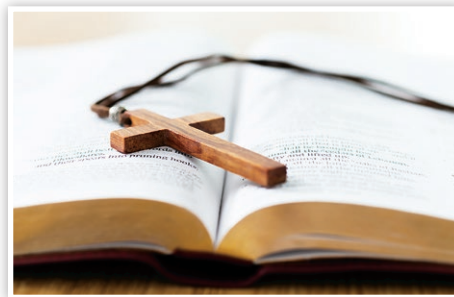
Through CLI I am learning more in-depth how to fully trust and let God reign over my life. I am so grateful to be able to build this relationship with Him through the CLI Bible studies. My goal now is to give my life completely to God. I know where my way takes me, so it's got to be His way. Today I know who I am. I am exactly who He made me to be. I am a child of God!

Quickly On Board

By Brigitte Lea Huling

I remember that very first YMCA where my mom, Kathleen Skaar, put her books. It started as just a small, unique library of Christian content. It was a way to share the Good News and encourage others in their walk with Christ. I was excited about this new ministry, especially having just received Christ as Savior myself! I was quickly on board and became one of the first financial supporters. There is no doubt God's hand has been with CLI from the very beginning. I have witnessed CLI grow from the first YMCA, to the very first local prison, to prisons nationwide.

I can't help but reflect on life this very day and how COVID-19 has affected all of us. It has given us all a glimpse of a type of prison life. Certainly, we still have our freedom, and we have not committed a crime, but we are having to give up some of our rights for the good of others. Most of us are out of work, school, unable to shop, or worship together in a church.



Life is so very different right now. All of this has brought to the forefront of my mind those that are now in isolation, including those in prison.

While the imprisoned have committed crimes and are serving the time for their actions, it is wonderful to know that CLI is still able to send God's Word to those in isolation. This can be a time of life change — of salvation. This is why I will continue to support CLI. We will be amazed at the lives changed by Christ through this ministry, and I pray this work will continue for many years to come.

That Bible Under My Bunk

By Steven (an inmate in Kincheloe, MI)

My name is Steven. I was raised in a Christian home, but we didn't go to church much. I accepted Christ as my Savior when I was 15 years old while attending a youth retreat with my church. Over the years I strayed from God and fell headfirst into the evil ways of this world. I spent many years as a young man behind bars.

For nearly 28 years I was able to avoid serious trouble, until that dreadful day I will never forget: June 6, 2018. That day the Michigan State Police raided my home with a warrant for my arrest. While in the Allegan County Jail I was offered a Bible by my cellmate who was being released. I declined, saying, "I didn't come to jail to find God." That Bible (The Life Recovery Bible) sat on the floor under my bunk for quite a while. I can still see it there in my mind.

I later began reading a book that had many Scripture references throughout it. Finally, I reached for that Bible under my bunk to look up those references. From that moment on my life has never been the same. That Bible was donated by you, Christian Library International.

¡Bienvenidos, CLI – México!



Amidst the rise of the current pandemic in the world, our sovereign Lord continues to lead at the helm of CLI. Long before this crisis, God had impressed on Kathleen's heart that it was time for CLI to take the gospel message into the prisons of Mexico. Plane tickets were purchased. Accommodations were booked. Kathleen and Anders were set for a two and a half week survey trip to interview for staff and meet with potential partners on the ground. Without fear or hesitation, they trusted fully in God's leadership and flew to Mexico City, Mexico.

As anticipated, CLI will have to operate quite differently in Mexico. The mail system simply doesn't work there. In the US, CLI relies on the mail to ship our books, mail the Bible study lessons and receive news of decisions for Christ. In Mexico, the Christian materials will have to be carried into the facility by volunteer pastors and Bible teachers. An 800 number will be stamped inside of each book, instead of an address, as Mexican inmates have access to telephone services as needed. When Mexican prisoners call that number, they will be instructed to leave a voicemail with the reason for their call. The message will then be recorded and automatically sent by email to CLI.

Save the Date

Sept. 29, 2020

CLI's 25th Anniversary Celebration Dinner in Raleigh at Angus Barn Pavilion at 6:30 pm

Become a Sponsor:

Bronze \$1,500

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In recognition of our compliance with Standards of Responsible Stewardship, CLI has been accredited by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability.



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*"Everything that has happened with
CLI has to do with God..."*

It's All About God

Kathleen, along with her older brother, grew up in a poor, industrial neighborhood of Tampa, Florida. Enjoying a typical childhood, they rode the bus to school every day, played at the park with the neighborhood children, and attended church with Grandma. Kathleen remembers the day as an eight year old girl that she saw her brother in tears as her dad drove away for the last time. Once the divorce was final, these two children would spend the rest of their childhood being raised by a single mom. A strong bond was formed between Kathleen and her brother, and that continued until his death at age 55.



Kathleen and her older brother

Education was pushed strongly by Kathleen's mother, so after graduating from high school, Kathleen enrolled in the University of Florida. While there, she took a class called Religions of the World and came out an atheist. Though she had attended church

as a child, she did not have a personal relationship with the Lord. The professor of this class really did a great job at ruining what little faith she did have. She searched for answers, tried to talk to different people about it, but no one could truly help her find meaning and purpose to her life.

Upon graduation from college, Kathleen asked herself, "What's next?" Being a very goal-oriented person, she mapped out a plan for her life and put it into action. She married, had three children, and became a career woman, but nothing ever really satisfied her. She became an entrepreneur, starting a magazine and a children's book store. Various family decisions moved her from Florida to California and finally to North Carolina.

In 1995, Kathleen and her husband, Anders, moved to Raleigh and joined a church. Joining a church was more because it was "the thing to do" and not for any religious reason. At that time the women of the church were going on a retreat, and Kathleen decided to go. In one of the sessions the

speaker said, "If you've never invited Jesus into your life, you can pray now."

Kathleen's first thought intellectually was, "That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard!" But in the very next second Kathleen testifies to actually feeling the movement of the Holy Spirit in her heart. Immediately, she bowed her head and prayed for Jesus to come into her life. And He did!

Her life changed dramatically — not necessarily on the outside, but on the inside. She had such a thirst and desire to know God. She arrived home from the retreat and told Anders that she had accepted Jesus. When she told him that God was now Number 1 in her life, he replied, "Well, I better be Number 2!" Because of the testimony and life Kathleen lived in front of her husband, Anders accepted Christ nearly six months later.

Kathleen longed to grow in the Lord. An insatiable desire to know God developed a passion for His word. In addition to reading the Bible, she started reading Christian books. Every time she had a question, God would bring just the right book at just the right time. It was through the power in God's word and the Christian books she read that Kathleen was discipled. Within that first year after her salvation experience, Kathleen realized the tremendous impact these Christian books were having on her life and wanted to share them with others.

She started praying. After all, she had learned from all the scripture and Christian books she had been reading that prayer was vital to the Christian life. In 1996, nearly a year after her conversion, God laid on her heart the ministry that would become Christian Library International. Kathleen decided then that prayer would always be a pillar of this new ministry. She prayed this prayer to God and wrote it out as a testament for the next 25 years of ministry:

"God, I pray that Christian Library International would grow and mature for Your glory in every detail, and that Your will be done. I pray that it would meet the spiritual needs of its readers, users and volunteers."



Kathleen and her older brother

It's All About God—cont.

The burden of how to get these Christian books that had influenced her so greatly into the hands of others still weighed heavily on her heart. After much prayer, Kathleen sought some advice from Anders about what to do with these books. Anders said, "Why don't you go down to the YMCA, and see if you could put some books there?" So she did, and the YMCA was very excited about it. She started with about 100 donated books — some from friends and the rest from her personal library. What began as a self-checkout system in one YMCA spread to all of the Raleigh YMCA locations. Soon she had so many Christian books that she began to donate them to the local homeless shelters as well as sending them to missionary families across the globe.



From left: CLI volunteers Joanne Donaton, Lainie Hoverstad and Kathleen in 2000

From the very beginning she recognized that it was the hand of God moving in her life and the lives of those to whom these books were given. In 2002, Kathleen and Anders Skaar counted the cost. These two young Christians were ready to be all in — together.

Anders quit his job and joined Kathleen in full time ministry. Until then the ministry was being run out of their house. Anders began calling prison chaplains to tell them about the extra Christian books they had. Their response was immediate. All the prison chaplains kept saying, "You have no idea what an answer to prayer you are! We don't have the money or the resources to provide Christian materials to the inmates who so desperately need them." Prison chaplains are often responsible to ministry to between 2,000 and 5,000 inmates. Their need was great, and once again, God's hand was seen moving His ministry forward, now into prisons.

With the ministry's growth also came trials. Still young in their faith, the Skaars had launched out into the deep. Having depleted their savings account, funds became tight. They trusted God but wondered how they were going to make it financially. They sold their home and other possessions to make ends meet. They downsized in order to invest more of their resources into the ministry God had begun in their hearts. Financial partners and volunteers became the life blood of CLI. Others were catching the vision and wanted to be a part of this growing mission of advancing Christ's light in prisons.

In 2005, with nearly 500 prisons receiving Christian books and Bibles from the ministry, another need was presented from the chaplains in these facilities. Passionately serving the inmates, these chaplains longed to see the men



Kathleen and Anders in 2005

and women under their care begin to make substantial growth in their walk with God. Most of the incarcerated under their care were new Christians and needed to be disciplined, but one chaplain could not do it all. Kathleen wanted to help, but how? It was as if she could hear the Macedonian call from the Apostle Paul's vision in Acts 16:8. Having already completed seminary classes, Kathleen now had a purpose greater than herself to complete her Bible education degree. She eventually graduated with her masters of divinity and began writing Bible studies specifically for the purpose of making disciples in prisons.

Today, there are three sets of Bible studies available for inmates to complete. These three studies include 35 lessons teaching prisoners who God is, His leadership by His Spirit, and how to truly become a disciple of Christ. Since beginning these correspondence lessons in 2005, nearly 60,000 lessons have been completed by over 13,000 inmates. More and more volunteers have joined the ranks as Bible Ministers, Letter Ministers, Prayer Warriors, and onsite workers. Serving nearly 1,400 penal facilities, CLI has become a prison ministry alliance serving alongside chaplains, churches, businesses, donors and publishers at home and abroad.

On March 8th, 2020, CLI began celebrating its 25th anniversary year. Kathleen looks to this milestone as an opportunity to once again take a giant step of faith, casting vision for CLI Mexico to begin operations this spring. She recounts,

"Everything that has happened with CLI has to do with God and how God has worked in my life, and how He has worked in the lives of the staff, and how He will continue to work in us to glorify His name."