

PRINCIPLE 1 – COMING CLEAN

The Hungry Years

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Many times in my life I cannot help but reflect on the ten Christmas, and the ten New Year's I spent in prison. It always brings tears to my eyes to close my eyes and see my dad walk out of that prison, visiting room crying. I remember my brother JC, who sacrificed his entire life just so that I could spend a few hours with him and my parents. How unselfish he was.

I was doing time for crimes I committed, but what I did not realize that my brother was also doing time for crimes he refused to engage in. No matter how much I tried to get him to join with me in the cartel, he always refused. Money nor greed motivated him. In my crippled mind, I thought my brother did not have any balls and was a coward; after all, who did not want the power and the money I had?

Many years into my ten plus years of incarceration my brother send me the following letter, he titled it The Hungry Years:

"Throughout all our lives, we had a relationship that, for some reason or another, drifted apart. If it were not for the love of our Lord and Savior

Jesus Christ, we would have never recovered from the events that separated us.

*My brother, you made it to the top, you went so high you could not stop.
You climbed the ladder leading you nowhere; we were no longer
together building castles in the air.*

*You spun so fast you couldn't tell the gold ring from the carousel, how
could you know the ride would turn out bad. Everything you wanted was
everything you had.*

*I miss the hungry years, the once upon a time we didn't have a dime,
those days of you and me, got lost along the way. How could you be so
blind not to see the door closing on the world we now hunger for,
looking through my tears, I miss the hungry years.*

*We shared our daydreams one by one, making plans were so much fun,
we set our goals but never reached the highest star, things that we were
after seemed much better from afar.*

*Here we stand me and you with everything and nothing too, it was not
worth the price we had to pay, Jesus, please take us home, let us go back
to yesterday.*

*I miss the hungry years, the once upon a time, the lovely long ago we
did not have a dime, those days of me and you, we lost along the way.
How could you be so blind not to see the door closing on the world we*

now hunger for, looking through my tears, I miss the hungry years. Lord, I miss the hungry years."

When we came from Cuba, we left everything behind, even our mother. We left our toys, our friends, our relatives. It wasn't very easy for me as a ten-year-old to understand what it all meant, all I knew was that in Cuba we were happy and had everything we wanted, now eleven of us slept on the floor of a one-bedroom one bath apartment.

Back then, I was angry at not having money to buy lunch in school, having one meal a day, going hungry every day, and having to fight other kids for their lunch money. All I could do was to blame God for abandoning us, and at the same time, it created this desire to be rich at whatever the cost. Being broke meant being insignificant; money brings meaning to life.

I sacrificed everything and everyone to reach my goal, not knowing that the most significant moment in my life of happiness was right there in front of my eyes. My brother and I did whatever it took to make money. We cleaned cars, delivered papers, we cut grass, and even sold Christmas cards door to door.

I became very powerful and made millions of dollars a month when I was twenty, and then my brother and I separated, he did not want anything to do with the life I had chosen. I could not understand how anyone could refuse that life. I dated the most beautiful women in the world, flew all over the world in a private plane surrounded by a bunch of guys, everyone I knew. I had now reached the highest star; everything I wanted is everything I had. Yet, I could not understand why I was so miserable. I had women, money, planes, yachts, mansions. Are these not the things that truly make a man happy.

I was surrounded by many people, all but my best friend, my brother. Then one day it all came crashing down, I lost everything I had and went off to prison; everything but the most important thing ever in my life, my brother. *How could I be so blind not to see the door closing on the world I now hunger for?*

I do not know if I would have forgiven my brother as he forgave me. But I thank God that my brother was always the bigger man; his unconditional love did not allow him not to forgive me, no matter how much pain I caused him. So, when I fell, he was there to pick me up, no questions asked, no condemnation, no judgment, only unconditional

love. *Now looking through my tears, I miss the hungry years. Lord, I miss the hungry years."*

It is my prayer for you to STOP and LISTEN to that voice that is telling you that *if you ever reach the top, you could go so high you will not ever stop. And then all you will do is climb a ladder that will lead you nowhere. Don't be so blind that you can not tell the difference between the gold ring and the carousel; how will you know the ride could turn out bad. Everything you want might not be everything you will find.*

I want to take this opportunity to wish you and your family a very happy Merry Christmas.