

TRANSFORMED LIVES

By Kirk Noonan

WHEN *he was 29 years old, Francisco Mingates finally realized his drug addiction had taken everything but his life. His marriage was in shambles. His wife was distraught. His children didn't know him. His business was bankrupt. He was penniless. Even his body didn't function properly, forcing him to wear diapers.*

"I couldn't look anyone in the eyes," says Mingates. "I had gone down to nothing."

Knowing of only one option that might save him, Mingates enrolled in Portugal's Teen Challenge men's residential program. The decision saved his life. But it also started him on a journey with Jesus Christ that he continues to pursue.

"I didn't know what I believed in when I enrolled in Teen Challenge," says Mingates, "but I asked God to do something for me and He did. A sense of joy immediately came back to me."

Mingates is the first to admit his transformation was not overnight. At times during the one-year program, he regressed and questioned all the effort that



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was demanded. But he remained committed to it and today — 22 years later — he is a steadfast follower of Christ.

Soon after completing the drug rehabilitation and recovery program, Mingates joined a traveling evangelistic team, worked on restoring his relationship with his wife and children, and opened a bakery in Lisbon that now employs 22 people. But merely building his own business has never been his goal. Instead, Mingates works long hours for and gives generously to his local church and Teen Challenge, a program he believes can change other lives.

“What God did in me, He is doing and going to do in other people,” says Mingates, who supplies Portugal’s Teen Challenge centers and coffeehouses with free bread each week.

In Portugal alone, Teen Challenge operates six centers with nearly 200

students as well as 26 coffeehouses and outreaches that offer ministry and discipleship daily. Worldwide, Teen Challenge has more than 435 centers in 90 countries, including 175 centers in the United States.

A faith-based, substance-abuse recovery program, Teen Challenge was started in the ghettos of New York City by David Wilkerson in 1958.

“Teen Challenge is like no other place,” says Don Wilkerson, David’s brother and executive director of Global Teen Challenge. “We offer a total cure for the total person because we’re faith based and that’s what Jesus Christ does to people.”

The program’s plan of recovery is to teach addicts discipline, offer them a sense of family, share the gospel with them, teach them biblical principles, equip them with relational and job skills that build self-esteem and prepare them for life after Teen Challenge.

The system works.

Teen Challenge has a 70-percent cure rate among those who go through the one-year residential program. Wilkerson says that has less to do with the mechanics of the program than with the spiritual transformation most students experience.

Students attest to this.

Jesse Furtado, 38, entered Portugal’s Teen Challenge after being deported from Canada four years ago.

In 1997, while still in Canada, he committed his life to Christ. When he did, something unexpected happened — his withdrawal from drugs lasted only a few days. That showed him, he says, that God is real. Nevertheless, he turned his back on his newfound

faith and started doing drugs and committing crimes again. But shortly before his deportation, he called the Teen Challenge in Portugal and asked if he could get in. Once there, he recommitted his life to Christ. The relationship, he says, helped him kick his habit.

“I guess I never had made Jesus the Lord of my life,” he says of his first conversion experience. “I have faults and failures now like anyone else does, but nothing like before. When you search for Him with all your heart, your experience is genuine.”

Today, Furtado is on staff at the Teen Challenge headquarters in Fanhoes, a city on the outskirts of Lisbon, Portugal’s capital. By day he builds custom cabinets and furniture in the carpenter shop. At night he tries not to think about his past and the time he wasted and relationships he ruined as a drug addict. Instead, he focuses on his present and future.

“God’s plan for my life is slowly unfolding at, like, 1 percent a day, but that 1 percent helps me continue to search and discover what else He wants for me,” he says. “I have areas that are not completely established, but I start and end the day with Him, and that is a victory for me.”

Global Teen Challenge was started by missionary Howard Foltz in The Hague, Netherlands, in 1969. Since then it has spread throughout Europe and beyond, giving people bound by life-

controlling addictions a second chance at life. Teen Challenge centers also are located in Australia, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Central and South America.

“The key is finding someone who is desperate,” says Wilkerson. “You can’t change someone who doesn’t want to change. But many times a person doesn’t want to change because they don’t know they can be changed.”

Armando (a pseudonym) started working a full-time job when he was 9 years old so he could help his mother support his eight siblings. By the time he was 11, he was working the night shift at a bakery. At 12 he started buying designer clothing, smoking clove cigarettes and drinking liquor. When he was 14 he was a regular at local nightclubs and bars. By age 16 he was hooked on heroin.

“I believed no one liked me and that they only liked what I had,” he says. “I felt empty inside. It was nightmarish. I was depressed and I started to rob people.”

When he was 23 he realized his life was out of control. He yearned to get it back in order, so he gave up drugs but kept smoking and drinking. Homeless and hopeless, he fell back into doing drugs.

“My life was like a yo-yo,” he says. “But one day I woke up crying. I heard about the Teen Challenge coffeehouses and went to one of them. They spoke about God, and I knew I needed to do something.”

He went to a church service and saw people with their hands raised. He thought it was strange so he looked away. Still, he knew something was there that he needed.

“I started reading my Bible,” he says. “I had a desire to be closer to God.”

Armando entered Portugal’s Teen Challenge. Now, only a few months into the program, he realizes it is not easy to break away from his former lifestyle. But, he says, he is committed to his life being changed and living each day for God.

“One day I want to be at the center of God’s will,” he admits. “I want to feel good and be at peace. I want to be a good person — the kind of person people can look to and say he is a friend.”

Like Mingates and Furtado, Armando wants more from his life than the world has offered him.

If he stays with Teen Challenge, he too will be a living example of how God can use a ministry to make an impact on a person, a community, a nation and the world. **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.



Jesse Furtado

photo by Doug Pitt

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

“There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God’s forgiveness.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

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Assemblies of God National Prayer Center

