

“If the wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed, if he keeps all my statutes and does what is right and just, he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of the crimes he committed shall be remembered against him; he shall live because of the virtue he has practiced” (18:21-22). God is merciful and he really roots for us to succeed in life. A person who has made many mistakes in life is never beyond the reach of God’s love. But God does not do all the work. The sinner must repent and turn back to God.

Shon Hopwood was born in a small town in Nebraska. Following high school, he tried college for a semester but flunked out. He joined the Navy. His most noticeable accomplishment was drinking his way through two years of service. He returned home with few prospects for a better life. He worked a menial job and wasted his money on alcohol and drugs.

He wanted the better things in life but was not willing to work for them. Broke, frustrated, and seeing nothing wrong with his life, he and a friend concocted a get rich scheme. They robbed banks for a living. After his 5<sup>th</sup> bank robbery, Shon was a rich man momentarily. Then he was arrested, convicted, and sent to prison for a long time.

Still convinced of his own righteousness, he became a jailhouse lawyer to seek a release from prison. He was still unrepentant but thought he could argue his way out of jail. There was only one problem with this line of thinking. He was truly guilty, and he was properly punished for his crimes.

When he turned his selfish and self-serving interest outward to help others, good things began to happen. He offered to help other inmates who had suffered from poor representation. For the first time in his life, he really applied himself and he began to truly enjoy his volunteer work to help others file legal appeals.

A fellow inmate asked Shon to help him appeal his conviction to the Supreme Court. Shon was hesitant because he realized his legal skills weren’t up to the task. The friend kept on asking. “I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence” (Lk 11:8). Shon spent months trying to understand the original case, identify the errors made and write a compelling legal argument. It required great sacrifice on his part to really master the law. “If the wicked, turning from the wickedness he has committed, does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life; since he has turned away from all the sins that he committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die” (Ez 18:217-28).

The Supreme Court did not know who Shon Hopwood was. They judged his works on the merits of the argument he presented. The appeal was one of 8,000 petitions filed that year. Only “74 were accepted, one of those was written by Shon Hopwood.”<sup>i</sup> A prominent lawyer argued the case in front of the Supreme Court and won a unanimous decision with Shon’s help. Seeing the miracle that happened in Shon’s life, the prominent lawyer became a mentor and encouraged Shon throughout the rest of his 6 years of prison.

11 years after he was first incarcerated, Shon had served his time and returned to society a better man. He took a part time job, completed a college degree, and applied to law school. Today the former inmate is a well-respected faculty member teaching criminal law at Georgetown University.

“What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy ... I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance” (Lk 15:4-5, 7).

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<sup>i</sup> [cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-meet-a-convicted-felon-who-became-a-georgetown-law-professor-shon-hopwood-2019-07-21/](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-meet-a-convicted-felon-who-became-a-georgetown-law-professor-shon-hopwood-2019-07-21/)