

Aime Mukiza's Journey Back to Life

My amazing journey with Jesus started as a young boy who survived a war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Africa. In that war my parents and siblings were killed. I was only 2 years old and left to die but the United Nations Peacekeepers came to rescue me. They took me to a refugee camp in Uganda, the Nakivale Refugee Camp. In 2013, at the age of 16, I was brought to the United States by the UN and the Catholic Charities Community. They were working to rescue war-orphaned children experiencing life threatening critical conditions. I am a grateful recipient of their efforts.

The hand of God was obviously on Aime's life by how he survived the war and was chosen among hundreds of orphans to come to the US, but he carried some deep hurt inside. He says, "As I grew up I started running away from God and my journey with Jesus was corrupted by a lot of questions. I was ravaged by hard questions. I was angry at God because my family was killed in the war in Congo. I wanted to know why God allowed them to be killed. Why was I left all alone, orphaned? Why had God forsaken me?"

In high school I was seeing counselors every week to help me navigate life. I was trying to understand what had happened to me and my family. I didn't know how to approach life. At the age of 19 I finished high school and was enrolled at Northern Arizona University, (NAU). I wanted to major in Political Science and International Affairs. My hope was to make the world a better place then how I had found it. In my freshman year I experienced a full mental, emotional breakdown. I was overwhelmed by loneliness without any parental guidance and support. I was also aging out of the foster care program and transitioning into college. I had 3 suicide attempts, within 3 years of college. I was diagnosed with PTSD, anxiety disorder and a panic disorder and prescribed medication that I was to take indefinitely. The last time I attempted suicide, I actually died and was brought back to life. I woke up in a coma. I experienced even more pain realizing that I wasn't successful in taking my own life. When I opened my eyes, a doctor was praying for me. She told me that she was not allowed to pray for patients. She said that the only way I had woken up was through God's power. She said, "Give up everything, follow God, pray hard and dedicate your life to God". After that I went to live at the Guidance Center, a mental health facility, in order to receive more counseling and Psychiatric care. My goal was to get back to school and try to finish my final senior year at NAU



in 2021. It didn't go as planned. I was released from the Guidance Center and lost all hope. I started self-medicating, drinking too much and using drugs. I hoped that since suicide didn't kill me, perhaps alcohol and drugs would make me sleep forever. That same year I failed both semesters, all Fs. Needless to say, I didn't graduate and lost all my scholarships and financial aid due to bad grades.

I used what little energy I had left to try to get an internship outside of Flagstaff. I was hoping to change the environment, revive my grades and eventually graduate. Luckily I got an internship in Phoenix, without any money or a stable income. My former foster parents tried to help me but I was drinking too much and using all types of drugs, sabotaging all relationships. I destroyed the friends and connections I had built. I started living in a shelter in Phoenix at St. Vincent de Paul and Central Arizona Shelter Services. Sometimes I slept outside at Rio De Salado Park. I finished my internship and hoped to come back to NAU to finish school. My plan was to get a job and start over. I arrived back in Flagstaff with no plans of where to sleep but I knew it was summer and I could sleep outside if need be. During this time I was scared to go to a regular homeless shelter due to the previous experiences I had in the shelters in Phoenix where all my documents were stolen. In those shelters I had been exposed to more drugs, and was in and out of jail due to fighting. Drugs will do that to you; I was facing 5 to 10 years in prison. My foster parent had hired a lawyer trying to keep me out of prison. I knew I needed to find a safe place to live in order to get back to school and stay out of jail. They recommended that I go to the Sunshine Rescue Mission, (SRM), while trying to get back to NAU. I arrived at SRM and got a bed, good food to eat and prayers started. What happened from here is something I'm still fascinated about. God got me back to life by using the SRM leadership there, from the staff Coordinators, Director Jonathan and CEO Kathie.

In my first 3 days at SRM, God brought me back to that 16 year old boy who had grown up in an orphanage led by people of God. During the morning and evening bible classes and prayers I started remembering the memories of things God used to tell me when I was younger, growing up in an orphanage. I was still struggling with drinking and taking medication, but God's influence was growing at SRM. I knew I was definitely in the presence of God. I started feeling safe. I began to realize what needed to happen if I was to come back to life.

One day I was sleeping outside on a picnic table on The Rescue Mission patio. Kathie approached me and asked my name and talked a little bit. She asked The Mission Director if I could go with them to a Reset Ministries Retreat that was happening in Phoenix in just a few days. This "retreat" was focused on bible teachings, addressing past trauma, incredible testimonies from other believers and worship. The goal was to help people heal and build a relationship with God. One of the crucial moments was when they guided retreat attendees to ask Jesus who they truly were in the eyes of the Father God and ask God to help address past pain and forgiveness. I remembered what I was like as that 16 year old boy who had a good relationship with God, before I started blaming him for the death of my family. I compared that boy to the angry, broken adult me who was blaming everything on God. I was angry, broken, unhealthy, and dead-walking and I blamed everything on God. I just knew Jesus was not going to show up for me. Jesus was not going to be my advocate to his Father because I had sinned every sin as a form of revenge against God. All I could do was cry. I had run away from God knowingly and willingly because I was angry with him. While I was crying, Kathie came to me across the room. She asked me why I was crying. I

told her that I owed God nothing! I didn't need to ask God to forgive me. God owned me for killing my family or allowing people to kill my family. He left me abandoned. Kathie told me that God did not kill my parents. She said I was believing a lie. "Aime, that is not God's character", she said. Satan comes to lie, kill and destroy, not God", she said. Can you ask God to forgive you for blaming him all this time for something he didn't do?" she asked.

A breakthrough moment in my life took place within seconds as I asked God to forgive me. I also asked him to forgive the people who killed my family. I threw everything, all my baggage on the altar. I was crying in church while other people were praying. I was crying as I began to understand how far God had brought me and how far I had run from him. I was crying with the realization that I had so many sins and God wasn't going to hear me. I believed Jesus was ashamed of me. As I was praying and crying I felt someone holding my hand. I opened my eyes but there was no one there but my hand was still being held by someone. My eyes closed again and I saw Jesus standing next to me, holding my hand and looking at me. He asked me to walk with him. I walked knowing that this moment was like nothing I had ever experienced before, this was not my PTSD, anxiety disorder or panic disorder or just my mind playing tricks on me. I continued testing my body, making sure that I was not hallucinating. Still, Jesus held me tight and pulled me to walk with him. He walked me to The Father and we stood in front of God. If I could write all the details of what happened in that moment, it would fill up pages and pages. As we stood in front of God, Jesus told the father, "This is the child I have been telling you about." God extended his right hand to wipe my face, my tears and my lips. My lips looked like I was an abandoned child that had been drinking dead rotten milk. As God finished wiping my lips he placed his hand on my head, and it felt cold as ice. The cold ran through my head and went down in every vein from my head, through my arms and to my toes, all getting colder and colder, like ice running through my blood. After that moment I felt changes happening in my body. I started feeling joy that made no sense. I went down to the altar, got on my knees and prayed. People came and prayed over me and everything that hurt me, all the baggage from my past, every pain left my body. I was 26 years old when this happened last year. That was when I found that that young boy that God saved from the warzone, who sang in Sunday school in the refugee camp and called God his father. **In that moment, God brought me back to life.**

When we came back from retreat, the leadership at SRM, Kathie, Jonathan and others continued to be God's vessels in my life. Something strange happened, my PTSD stopped, my anxiety and panic disorders disappeared and I fell asleep without taking any of my medication. I started finding peace. I started recognizing the patterns that led me to being homeless. The SRM bed upstairs that I was sleeping in (a safe place to live), was just the beginning. The process shifted to healing, recovering and regaining what I had lost, including being reinstated back into college at NAU, getting my personal important documents replaced and eventually getting college scholarship funding reinstated. Imagine what it was like for me to call my doctor and explain to him why I was no longer taking my PTSD, anxiety and panic attack medications. I explained the events that led to how I healed. I summarized it as a miracle! I told him that it happened and that I would monitor how long this might last. I told him I'd get back to him if anything changed. The Guidance Center came to understand that I might have really healed. They wrote a letter to NAU stating that they believed I was ready to get back to school. No illnesses were diagnosed to further hinder my academic education. In addition, SRM leadership, Kathie, Jonathan and another leader from The

Corner, Pastor Joel wrote letters to the financial aid office asking them to re-admit me and reinstate financial aid. They said that if anyone deserved financial, I did.

Last year the NAU Financial Aid Department granted their approval for me to get back into school with financial aid to finish my final year of college. Although financial aid would not cover all of my school, SRM was supportive. They moved me to the Sanctuary House, a residential home for other guys like me where it was safe and quiet. Now I had a place to live and study like a normal student living on a school campus. Furthermore, SRM helped me get back my important identification documents such as my Green Card, driving license and everything else I needed to get a job.

Miracles continued! A company in Arizona read my resume, looked at places I did internships and reviewed my research on community sustainability. They offered me a professional job that should have required a college degree. I was honored by the job offer but afraid to accept it. What if it was too much for me and still finish college? My SRM leadership refused to make this decision for me even though I pleaded with them to do so. They insisted that God would guide my life if I would just trust him. I prayed and knew God was leading me to take the job even though many others told me I couldn't do it. I followed God's voice in my life and took the job! I'm now going to school full time with one semester remaining to graduate from NAU! I am also working full time in a professional job! This job is funding the remainder of my schooling and meeting other expenses, including setting aside the savings I will need to get my own apartment.

It's incredible all that God has done in my life. None of it started happening until I had lost everything and landed in a homeless shelter. If I tried to explain all that has really happened, there would be volumes and volumes. God has used SRM throughout my entire journey in too many ways to explain or measure.

To Him alone be the glory!

Some of the photos of Aime's journey with SRM. From Top (L-R) Aime with Brian, a staff Coordinator at SRM - Aime supporting a friend's baptism. The sign from his refugee camp as a child orphan. Mission Director Jonathan teaching Aime how to use power tools during a renovation project. Aime helping with inventory at SRM's thrift store. Aime with Ria, a valuable community and ministry partner. Aime with Carissa at Reset Ministries Retreat, the place where his healing journey really took off. Aime carries so much wisdom, sharing at a mens ministry camping trip.

