Bio - Mrs. Tonya M. Lewis

 As a child, I grew up in Miami with my brother and single mother. At a young age I watched my mother go through a lot of trials with my abusive father. I watched my father throw hot grease on my mother. My brother and I were separated from our mother for six months and placed in a foster home, choices where people treated us like we were nothing. My mother made some wrong in life, but she raised us as best as she could.

 I was molested at the age of five and seven. I asked God why me? At such a young age, I had a lot of responsibilities, more than the average child should have had to worry about. I felt as if the world was on my shoulders. I did not have the chance to be a child.

 I was pregnant at the age of 13, looking for love in all the wrong places. I gave birth to a still born little girl, name Tonya Maria Tillman. It bothered me, but God knew best.

 I left home at the age of 14, and lived in many places that were not safe. Imagine being exposed to a world full of surprises, such as getting caught up in the world of selling drugs at a young age in order to survive. Eventually that world caught up with me and I served 60 days in Yulee, Florida, a youth camp, canoeing on the Suwannee River. Boy, what an experience! It kept me out of trouble for a short time.

 After going through these things, I should have learned. Later I met a young man and became pregnant again at the age of seventeen. I had emergency surgery and again lost another child. Once again, I asked God why and how much more?

 Going out into the world again, this time I met a gentlemen by the of name

Mr. Oliver Wendell Lewis whom I later married. But once again tragedy, my husband was an innocent bystander and was killed by a stray bullet. If I had ever felt like the world ended at that point, I thought mine did. Still the pain is unbearable today.

 At the age of 20, I was experiencing many obstacles in my life. I was placed in prison for 18 months. At that time, prison was a joke because they had movies, games, and all kinds of things to pass the time away. I was released from prison and met another young man who had a lot of money, and took me all around different places. I later found out that he was into a drug lifestyle. The unlimited money captured my attention at such a young age. You know the lavish life. Again I got caught up in the system at the age of 22, only this time it was against me. The prosecution tried to sentence me to 33 years, not because of the crime which I was accused of, but for the information they wanted. I would rather have done time than to provide them with some dangerous information that would have cost me my life.

 Prison, again. This is where it stops, I was tired! I was sentenced to seven years prison, followed by12 years probation. I was going in circles again. My life was just revolved around problems, circumstances, and choices.

 Doing prison time was not in vain this time. I enrolled in school, achieved a couple of certificates in vocational classes: small engine repair, cosmetology, substance abuse 1 & 2, professional cooking and calligraphy class. God opened my eyes this time, and made it work for me. I graduated, and successfully received my G.E.D.

 I went through a lot upon returning home because society rejects a convicted felon. With all the education and experience, I was subject to working at a Dunkin Donuts and Eldorado Grand Prix Car Wash. I worked at both jobs for six months, generating $300 per week.

 I knew there had to be something better than that. In 1995 I started mowing yards with my ex-finance. Things did not work out, I went downtown, and obtained my business license for Lewis Lawn Care, Inc.

 Just when I thought things were going well with my lawn service, in 1996, I was the victim of first degree attempted murder. I was stabbed 21 times while in my sleep, by a 15 year old named Chaquail Lewis, my in-law, whom I was mentoring. She received 10 years in Florida State prison. Everyone deserves a chance, I thought. In addition to this my ex-fiancé was killed in a motorcycle accident. I really asked God why me? I knew somewhere in my life I needed to change something. So I asked God to guide my life from that point. I purchased a house at the age of twenty five. And things were hard, because being an African American woman in a predominately male industry was slim, but I was successful for 11 years. Thank God. Well in 2004, I completed 12 years probation. Thank God for his grace and mercy. It was such a very hard road to travel. Thanks to God, He allowed me to make it, when they said “I wouldn’t make it”.

 But I just did not want to stop there. I wanted to contribute back to the community, and kids. So, I formed a foundation, which is called “Children With a Vision, Inc”. It holds so many different titles. One is networking between business owners, community gatherings, and most of all school supplies for the kids. Mostly we mentor to the youth on life skills, consequences, and choices in life. The most important thing of all, I have my rights back to VOTE. Now I mean something in today’s society. **I have a voice.**

 I was once a Child With a Vision, and along the way people didn’t give up on me. So if I can help your child and many others, then God utilized me the way He intended. By the grace and mercy of God, learning from my mistakes has made me into the prosperous woman that I am today.

 I just wanted to say “thank you” for the people who’ve been in my life for a season, through my trials and tribulations, most of all my Success.

 I’m also a **“Child With a Vision”**

