



Paul Johnson fries turkey during the annual Narrow Gate Thanksgiving celebration

PAUL'S STORY

I was a troubled teenager who didn't have the right guidance. I was stumbling through life one bad decision after another. I just couldn't get it together. I had a lot of people trying to speak into my life, but I wasn't ready to hear what they were saying.

I was on probation after being arrested twice in one week—once for public intoxication and once for driving while intoxicated. I was facing two years of probation. I agreed to go to drug rehab, but it was a rough place. One of the counselors pulled me aside and said, “You don't belong here. You should go to Narrow Gate Lodge.”

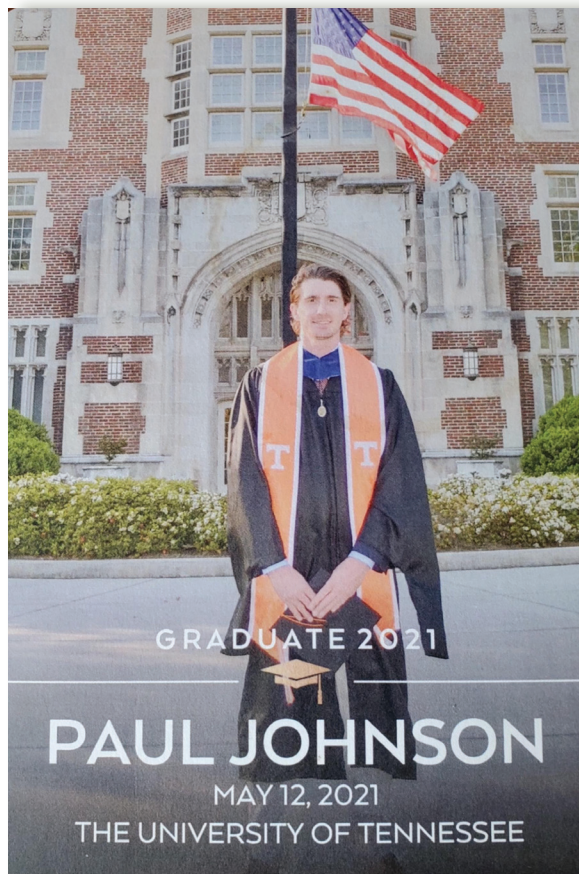
I left the rehab facility after just three days, but I kept screwing up and was soon facing a year in jail. That's when I applied to Narrow Gate, and miraculously got in. Looking back, it was all God.

A week after beginning at Narrow Gate, I had to leave and return to Alabama for my last court date. I met with my probation officer prior to my appearance and when he asked me what I had been doing, I told him about Narrow Gate. He looked it up online and started shaking his head. He saw that Narrow Gate was in Tennessee—and I was not supposed to leave the state of Alabama

DISCOVER A LIFE THAT MATTERS

as a condition of my probation. He paused for a moment, and I noticed he had crosses on his wall. “I’m going to go with my gut,” he said. “I’m going to ask the judge to release you.”

That day in court, the judge said, “Paul, it’s your lucky day.” I walked out a free man. I could’ve gone back home with my parents, but I didn’t. I chose to go back to Narrow Gate.



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On my first day back at Narrow Gate, the lesson was, “God is love.” It. Shook. Me. To. My. Core. I’d never heard it taught that way before. That was the moment that changed my life. Everything else has been built on that. My perception of God had been that He wasn’t loving, that because I’d done bad things, I didn’t belong to Him. We talked that day about what love is—about our perceptions of love—and then what the Bible says about it. There’s just something about getting the answers to the whys. About not just believing what you’ve been told but understanding your reasons why. It shapes you. It’s life changing.

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While at Narrow Gate, I took a strong liking to carpentry. After graduation, I worked for a year in commercial trim carpentry with Del Hardin for his business, Shield Construction. Del has never been a member of the Narrow Gate staff, but he’s certainly an integral part of the Narrow Gate family. After connecting with Narrow Gate as a volunteer, God put it on his heart to launch a business where he could employ and mentor Narrow Gate graduates. Graduates with a passion for construction have gone on to build solid careers there.

I also met John Pearson, another committed supporter of Narrow Gate’s mission, and learned he was an accountant. I was

interested in becoming an accountant, but I had committed to working a year with Del—and after Narrow Gate, when I said I was going to do something, I did it.

Then I broke my shoulder and could no longer do trim carpentry. JP (John Pearson) invited me to come and work with him in Texas in his business, Action Professional Outsourcing. I worked in an intern-like role helping with bookkeeping tasks under John's guidance.

While doing life with JP and working in his office, I attended community college. College before Narrow Gate had amounted to a couple of courses here and there. I took an accounting class and got an "A." I applied to several four-year schools and was accepted at every school. I chose to attend University of Tennessee Knoxville, and I joined a church plant. I loved being connected with that church and helping with Bible studies.

A lot of kids deal with stress and anxiety. Maybe they didn't have a great upbringing. Maybe they didn't have anyone to look up to. Maybe they feel like they must do it on their own. But you're not on your own. God is with you. A lot of the kids I was in classes with during college were just there because they didn't know what else to do. It was cool getting to share my story with them. You need to find out who you are before you try to decide what you want to do in life. Figure out what that is, and then do the hard things you need to do to get there.

In 2019, I received my Bachelor's degree in Accounting, and went on to complete my Master's degree in Accounting in May of 2021.

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Narrow Gate was a vital step for me in becoming a man. I know people my age who still don't know who they are. It makes me grateful for Narrow Gate and the time I had to figure things out.

Oh, and the woodworking skills I picked up there? They have not gone to waste! I like to build furniture. I built a bedroom set as a wedding gift for a good friend. Carpentry is a stress reliever for me—using my hands to create something that's beautiful. Taking wood with no purpose and giving it purpose. It's an analogy that always makes me think of what I experienced at Narrow Gate.

—Paul Johnson