

Missionary Mentors Drug Addict-Turned Pastor in Brazil

“When people die, is it like this?” Peter Moreira Esteves wondered.

Esteves was bleeding from a bullet wound in his shoulder as two police officers shoved him against the outer wall of a shack in a thicket.

“Give me three bullets,” one policeman said to the other. “I’m going to kill this guy.”

The then 18-year-old Brazilian had been out of jail just three days, and—driven by drugs—he’d stolen a car. When police chased him down a dead-end road, he jumped out of the car and tried to run into the woods. Esteves didn’t get far.

“God, don’t let them kill me,” he prayed silently as the officer brandished the gun.

Esteves’ mother once told him that, even in his last moment of life, he could **repent** and God would forgive his sins. But now, in his last moment, Esteves couldn’t bring himself to repent. He couldn’t bring himself to feel anything at all.

But he prayed: “God, will you let me die like this? Without repenting? Don’t let me die like this.”

Suddenly, backup policemen arrived, and the officer lowered his weapon.

“I believe if it were only the two of them, they would have killed me,” Esteves said later. “But since there were other witnesses, they didn’t.”

Even so, the police officers surrounded Esteves and beat him so severely he almost died of blood loss. And after a trip to the hospital, Esteves found himself back in jail in Rio de Janeiro.

Esteves's life of crime started after he got hooked on drugs as a teenager. He began selling items from his parents' home to support his marijuana and cocaine habit and even sold his mother's wedding ring. Soon Esteves found himself spending nights on the street and going days without eating.

"I was arrested many times when I was underage," Esteves said. "My mother was a lawyer, and she would get me out of jail."

But after Esteves turned 18, his father threatened to leave his mother if she bailed him out again.

"People in his family were ready to give up on him," said Eric Reese, an International Mission Board missionary in Rio, now a mentor to Esteves. "But his mom just would not give up on him."

After spending a month in jail, Esteves returned home with his mother. Esteves' father met them at the door.

"I expected the worst," Esteves said. "But when he got close to me, he hugged me and he told me these exact words, 'My prodigal son, I love you.'"

Esteves hugged his father back and begged his **forgiveness**. Then his mother took him inside the house.

"She put me on my knees with her, but she couldn't pray. She just cried," Esteves remembered.

In that moment, he finally repented. "I started a new life with Jesus, and I started serving the Lord," Esteves said. "That was 25 years ago."

Today, Esteves serves as a pastor and the director of an

English course with 400 students. His home is filled with the love of children and grandchildren. And he actively shares his faith with the city that once nearly claimed his life.

“Peter has made a radical change. When he came to Christ, he came whole-heartedly,” Reese said. “The grace of God has brought that guy from near deaths and shootings, to now, a beautiful family, a lovely wife, awesome kids. Only the grace of God could do that.”

Though Reese didn’t lead Esteves to Christ, the missionary has been there for him as a spiritual brother. Over several years, Reese has discipled him, and the two have served together to spread the gospel in the megacity of Rio.

“It was very important for me to meet Pastor Eric,” Esteves said. “He started to be like a mentor to me. I knew that God had something special to do with my life, but I didn’t know what. And at that time, Pastor Eric helped me to understand this call.”

Looking at Peter today, no one could guess that he had once been enslaved to drugs. His face conveys only the joy of Christ.

“As I discipled Peter, he would always smile,” Reese remembered. “He always smiles. He’s smiling today.”

Esteves’ is a life changed by walking with Jesus. And as an IMB missionary working in this South American megacity, Reese has been there to encourage him in that walk.

“‘Shine, Jesus, shine,’” Reese said, quoting a well-known **Christian praise song**. “I see the love of God, the mercy of God and the goodness of God shining in Peter’s life.”