

John Rusnak is a former Wall Street trader. In 2001 John was convicted for a financial scandal at Allied Irish Banks. Close to US \$700m in losses were hidden from his employer, leading to a 7.5 year prison sentence. John now helps young men being held in adult prisons transition to the next stage of their life. The motivation for his work comes from the redemption he himself experienced in prison.



Qn John, thanks for joining us. You live in Baltimore, but I understand you are on the road at the moment...

I'm in Charleston South Carolina, I've spent the day in the detention centre at a bond (bail) hearing for someone.

Qn I'll play a small clip from reporters at the time if we have the technology to do it...then ask, 'How does it make you feel when you hear this again?'

Peter played the radio compilation about the \$700m fraud discovered at Allied Irish Banks. The AIB CEO "it's a big number".

Qn. How does that make you feel now?

I know I'm forgiven by God, but I still suffer under guilt. It's not cathartic to continue to talk about these events, it's not easy to share what an ass I've been. But I believe it's what God has called me to do.

Qn Before we get into this story, tell us a bit about your upbringing?

I grew up in a family with some relatives who were sometimes on the wrong side of the law and were happy to "paint outside the lines". I was good at school, I received scholarship to a fancy school. I realised I didn't fit in with the elites. I pretended to fit in, I bought the clothes and pretended to be like them.

Qn What drew you to working on Wall Street?

Was a maths major and good with technology so I went to work in a bank. Someone had just bought a stack of computers and didn't know what to do with them. I set up the system. Then someone said you should be in trading. "You have no idea how much money we are making."

I realised that trading was a way for me to prove that I'm smart and worthwhile. "If I'm making more money than you, I'm worth more than you."

Qn How would you have described yourself and your life before the trouble started?

This was mid 80s into early 90s. I got married young 23. My wife was a Christian, I went to church on Sunday with her - then during the week I would rage at work. "they almost gave you cocaine with your breakfast". Alcohol etc. We had a sports team mentality. It was a crazy time, competition between traders. That was the culture but the sin was mine. It was my choice. I thought I was the smartest guy in the room. I was angry, I thought I was always right.

Qn I assume you didn't wake up one morning and say, I'm going to defraud the bank. So how did the troubles start?

Now I would describe myself as a child of God. Then I defined myself as a trader. I didn't listen to a potential mentor. I thought I could do it all on my own.

I had some friends who established the Allied Bank of Ireland in NYC, they wanted to ramp up the trading environment. So I moved to start up things with them. I soon realised that my success wasn't just me. I'd previously had a huge organisation around me, info and infrastructure. When it came to me and starting up, I realised I wasn't so clever. I was losing money. If I wasn't the genius trader, then who was I?

I started losing more money, and then chasing the loses. And I needed to cover up these loses somehow. I began sourcing money from people, I tried to increase our bets in order to win the money back.

"If the markets had gone the way I wanted I would probably be an unrepentant CEO now. "

Qn How did you sleep at night, knowing the positions you were sitting on?

I didn't sleep at night. I had all the screens etc at home. I stayed up a lot, used drugs to stay awake. Eventually there was a due diligence team that came in to look over the finances of the bank. It became evident that we were going to be found out.

I resigned and turned myself in to the FBI.

Qn Was it a relief when you were caught out?

Yes, the worst thing in life is carrying a secret – it was a relief.

Although the story was on front pages of the papers, there were still some people who loved me and God as well.

Qn Did your wife have any idea?

My wife was relieved – and angry - when it all came out. I had previously been pushing her away, as it was impossible to live with the incongruity of the double life I was living.

Qn I assume it must have been heart breaking to explain to your two kids...

I'm not sure that my kids (7-8years old) really understood what was happening until I had to leave to go to prison. Baltimore (or smallitmore) is a close-knit community, so everyone knew what happened. It can be a very socially condemning structure.

Qn You had effectively been living a double life...how did prison change you?

My journey is from humiliation to humility. It was so humiliating to go to gaol.

"Humiliation" – is what other people do to you.

"Humility" is realising that you are not that important. And not the centre of the world.

Now I can look like the "church guy" but I try to have integrity, i.e., to be the same man wherever I am, whether with a guy in prison, or at church or wherever.

Qn Your wife stuck by you. Why?

As a good Christian girl, she realised God hates divorce so she chose to stay with me. As she stayed that good had a ripple effect, good came from it, in many ways.

Qn 16. You are now in a different line of work....laundering of a different kind...how did that come about?

I can't work at a bank anymore. I've had a series of small business. "Wendy's, dry cleaning", restaurants. My passion is ministry – **"uncuffed"** - with young men charged with crimes. I don't think prisons should be knocked down. It's about God's word not being in handcuffs even when Paul is in prison.

2Timothy 2:8 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, :9 for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. **But God's word is not chained.**

So, I'm trying to reintegrate offenders back into society. We joke that the small businesses I run only employ ex-criminals and drug addicts. So often these people are really loyal and thankful, other times they set you up for armed robbery.

I'm trying to teach them to live by the wisdom from heaven.

James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.:17But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Qn How would you describe yourself now, post the fraud and post prison?

I need accountability, other people to speak into my life. Because I'm so good at impersonating the voice of God in my head.

Qn 18. Do you think you are still defined by the things you did on Wall Street?

I sometimes feel like it would be all that would be remembered at my funeral, but my friends and family remind me, that the key thing is "I am loved" by God and by other people.

I'm still on the hook for \$600+ million, I can never repay that amount.

Discussion Questions

1) John said.....

"Humiliation" – is what other people do to you.

"Humility" is realising that you are not that important. And not the centre of the world.

The Apostle Peter says...

1Peter 5:5 ...all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because,

“God opposes the proud

but shows favour to the humble.”

:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he

may lift you up in due time.**:7** Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

How do we learn humility?

- Are we prone to thinking sometimes that “I am the smartest guy in the room”?
- It is worth reflecting on how much of our achievements are dependent on others in our lives.
- John spoke about God deliberately allowing or sending hard things into our lives. “The severe mercy of God” – Do you agree?

2) Accountability in our lives

John spoke about the difference now is that he has good men around him who hold him accountable. (“I'm so good at impersonating the voice of God in my head.”)

How have you experienced this in your life?

What steps can you take to have such support and be a support to others?