Zephaniah 3:17 “The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”

Nehemiah 9:17 “But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love…”

Acts 9
1 Then Saul,

Philippians 3:3–6
4...If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so:
5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;
6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.
If a person has stayed the right side of the law all their life, has always helped with something, given his spare time to help charities, and has a happy family that are the same is that person still a sinner because he holds no religion?

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

1 Corinthians 2:14
14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.
“NOW,” SAID MOODY, “THIS IS AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE EFFORT WE CHRISTIANS ARE MAKING TO AROUSE THE UNCONVERTED TO AN INTEREST AND DELIGHT IN SPIRITUAL THINGS.
THE REASON WE CAN’T DO SO IS BECAUSE THE SINNER IS SPIRITUALLY BLIND.”

1 Saul - still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest  2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

3 As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.  
4 Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”  
5 And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”
Jesus preached GRACE.

Maybe it was Sthéphens face as he was forgiving those who were stoning him to death.

Maybe it was the disciples that hung around prostitutes and tax collectors.

YOU ARE LIKE A GOAD TO THEM, YOU KEEP PRODDING AND THEY KEEP KICKING.
6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

7 And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.

8 Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.
9 And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”

11 So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.
11 So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying.

12 And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.”

13 Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem.

14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”

15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

Ten years into my prison sentence and feeling despondent and without hope, another inmate came up to me one day as I was walking the prison yard on a cold winter’s night. He introduced himself and began to tell me that Jesus Christ loved me and wanted to forgive me. Although I knew he meant well I mocked him because I did not think that God would ever forgive me or that He would want anything to do with me.
Still this man persisted and we became friends. His name was Rick and we would walk the yard together. Little by little he would share with me about his life and what he believed Jesus had done for him. He kept reminding me that no matter what a person did, Christ stood ready to forgive if that individual would be willing to turn from the bad things they were doing and would put their full faith and trust in Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross by dying for our sins.

He gave me a Gideon’s Pocket Testament and asked me to read the Psalms. I did. Every night I would read from them. And it was at this time that the Lord was quietly melting my stone cold heart.
One night, I was reading Psalm 34. I came upon the 6th verse, which says, "this poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him from all his troubles".

It was at that moment, in 1987, that I began to pour out my heart to God. Everything seemed to hit me at once. The guilt from what I did... the disgust at what I had become... late that night in my cold cell, I got down on my knees and I began to cry out to Jesus Christ.

I told Him that I was sick and tired of doing evil. I asked Jesus to forgive me for all my sins. I spent a good while on my knees praying to Him.

When I got up it felt as if a very heavy but invisible chain that had been around me for so many years was broken. A peace flooded over me. I did not understand what was happening. But in my heart I just knew that my life, somehow, was going to be different.
More than eleven years have gone by since I had that first talk with the Lord. So many good things have happened in my life since. Jesus Christ has allowed me to start an outreach ministry right here in the prison where I have been given permission by prison officials to work in the Special Needs Unit where men who have various emotional and coping problems are housed. I can pray with them as we read our Bibles together. I get the chance to show them a lot of brotherly love and compassion.

I have also worked as the Chaplain’s clerk and I also have a letter writing ministry. In addition, the Lord has opened ways for me to share with millions via TV programs such as Inside Edition in 1993 and A & E Investigative Reporter in 1997, what He has done in my life as well as to warn others about the dangers of getting involved in the occult.

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed [gratefully praised and adored] be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant and boundless mercy has caused us to be born again [that is, to be reborn from above—spiritually transformed, renewed, and set apart for His purpose] to an ever-living hope and confident assurance through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
Acts 16:13–14
13 On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there.
14 One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying.

2 Timothy 1:9
9 For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus.
Titus 3:4–5  But—When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love,
5 he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.

17 And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit will give you the power to tell others about Jesus even when persecution arises.

You have to put away your past religious, legalistic and self-righteous attitudes and understand the amazing grace of God.
I came to this school with a distorted image of God, as a frowning super cop looking to squash anyone who might be having a good time. How wrong I was. I have come to know this God who has a soft spot for rebels, who recruits people like the adulterer David, the whiner Jeremiah, the trader Peter, and human rights abuser Saul of Tarsus. I have come to know a God whose Son made prodigals the heroes of the stories and the trophies of this ministry.

I am wearing a neck brace as a result of a rollover accident a few months ago. For seven hours that day I lay strapped to a gurney unsure whether I would survive the next hour. After all the fire and brimstone sermons I have heard in childhood, I fully expected to smell at least a with of sulfur at such a time. To my great relief, I did not. The God I serve is a God I have come to trust, one who scans the horizon for the prodigal and runs to greet him, or her.

I hold in my hands A letter from a student who graduated from this college a few years before me. “Unlike you,” she writes, “I went to Bible College supremely confident. The future looked bright with promise. The reason I was so confident was that I was a quintessential legalist. I was a Pharisee. I thrived on the rules.” She was like Saul.

She goes on to tell of marrying a missionary kid she met here, who over the next 25 years betrayed their marriage hundreds of times with both heterosexual and homosexual liaisons. Then she learned that her “godly father” who conducted family worship everyday have been sexually molesting his granddaughters. A year later her own teenage daughter was raped by an intruder. “Would there be no end to the sorrows?”

After describing these family tragedies in detail she tells her life-giving discovery of God’s grace. “I loved my Christian lifestyle but I didn’t love God” she says of her
time at this school “but since then I have been the recipient of the scandalous grace you write about.

At a time in my life when I wanted and expected to have hands full of accomplishments for God instead I came to Him with empty hands.” It was only then that she felt the goodness and mercy of God and a deep contentment and peace settled in amid the pain and sorrow.

Nothing YOU do to EARN a relationship with God will work but understanding it is only what Jesus did FOR you that you will have to humbly receive is what matters to God.

No longer do you have to work to make God happy with you.

BECAUSE you are amazed by His grace on your life.
16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.”