**Former KKK Terrorist Now Radical for Jesus**

**Former KKK Terrorist Cites C.S. Lewis’ Faithful Obedience**
from Baptist Press
August 9, 2006
by Marilyn Stewart

OXFORD, England (BP)--Once billed as “the most dangerous man in Mississippi,” former Ku Klux Klan member and terrorist Tom Tarrants became a Christian while in prison for attempted murder and now serves as president of the C.S. Lewis Institute in Washington, D.C.


Tarrants shared his testimony with a group of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary faculty, students and friends as part of this summer’s study program at England’s Oxford University. The NOBTS program offers seminary course credit and the opportunity to study under evangelical thinkers in combination with visiting religious and historic sites in England and Scotland.

Born and raised in Mobile, Ala., during the years of racial segregation, Tarrants bitterly opposed the move toward racial equality in the 1960s, directing his hatred toward Jews, whom he believed were involved in a communist plot against America and whom he viewed as God’s enemies.

As a young man in his early 20s, Tarrants aligned himself with Sam Bowers, a man who was later convicted for his part in the murder of three civil rights workers in Philadelphia, Miss. -– the story fictionalized in the movie “Mississippi Burning.” The FBI referred to Bowers’ group, the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, as the most violent right-wing terrorist group in the nation.

As an operative for the White Knights, Tarrants was involved in some 30 bombings of synagogues, churches and homes before being apprehended in an FBI sting operation in Meridian, Miss. In the ensuing shootout between Tarrants and law enforcement officers, Tarrants’ female accomplice was killed and he was shot 19 times, almost ending his life.

After months of recovery, Tarrants began a 30-year sentence in the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, one of the most volatile prisons in the nation at the time. He escaped shortly after being incarcerated but was apprehended in yet another shootout that took the life of another accomplice.

His only diversion from prison life was to retreat into reading. One day Tarrants picked up a Bible. The words of Jesus haunted him: “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?”

Although he had attended a Southern Baptist church as a child, Tarrants realized he was not a Christian and his life had been a contradiction to biblical teaching. Alone in his cell, Tarrants gave his broken life to Christ. He renounced his racism and hatred and committed his life in service to Christ and mankind.

The realization that he had only narrowly escaped death when he was apprehended convinced him that God had another purpose for his life.

Later, Tarrants found out that the wife of an FBI agent involved in his capture had been praying for his salvation for years. After his conversion, the FBI agent and his wife, along with others who had been the targets of his hatred, were instrumental in securing his release after eight years in prison.
Tarrants then earned college and seminary degrees and served in various ministry positions, including a co-pastorate at the evangelical Christ our Shepherd Church in Washington, D.C.

Tarrants has authored the book, “The Conversion of a Klansman,” and coauthored “He’s My Brother” with African American evangelical leader John Perkins.

Once a crusader for hate, Tarrants now, as president of the C.S. Lewis Institute, fills a role of educating and equipping those who, like Lewis, want to defend their faith and impact their world with truth.

C.S. Lewis, Tarrants said, was a radical disciple of Jesus who happened to be an Oxford don and a brilliantly gifted writer. Tarrants reminded the NOBTS group to give all to God -– both heart and mind. Tarrants told them Lewis believed “that true knowledge of God comes from obedience.”

“I was deeply encouraged to hear how a single biblical encounter broke through years of insincerity and hatred to transform a man’s life beyond recognition,” NOBTS student Jason Palmer said of Tarrants’ testimony.

Tarrants’ story resounded with the NOBTS group due to the school’s prison education efforts. NOBTS recently began an extension program for inmates at Parchman, the very place where Tarrants made his commitment to Christ. The program is similar to the highly successful NOBTS program at Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola, La.

**Former Terrorist Brings Gospel Message Against Racism**

Washington Post article
January 30, 1993
By Carey Kinsolving

In summer 1967, J. Edgar Hoover ordered FBI agents to Mississippi in an all-out search for a Ku Klux Klan member of the notorious White Knights, who had begun bombing several Jewish synagogues. Almost a year later, the hunt ended after a car chase and shootout that left one woman dead, an FBI agent seriously wounded and the bomber lying in his own blood after receiving four shotgun blasts at close range.

Few thought Tom Tarrants, who was caught carrying a bomb to a Jewish businessman and civil rights leader’s house, would live. But the man an FBI agent once called a “mad-dog killer” not only lived, he has been transformed. That is according to his own account, those of an FBI agent and a Jewish leader who helped put him in jail, and now a journalist, Jack Nelson, who has written a book that revolves around Tarrants’s story.

Tarrants’s conversion to Christianity did not come immediately. Reported by prison officials to have been the most brilliant inmate ever to serve time in the Parchmount, Miss., prison, Tarrants escaped once and spent three years in solitary confinement in a 6-by-9-foot cell.

For the first year, Tarrants continued to feed the hate that fueled his previous activities by reading books such as “The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich” and “Mein Kampf.” But the breakthrough came as he plunged first into the Greek philosophers and then the Bible.

Tarrants said he gleaned two thoughts that led him to take a more critical look at his life – “the unexamined life was not worth living” and “truth exists independently of what we may believe.” The wall of hate that Tarrants had built around himself crumbled.

“The light came on,” said Tarrants, who spent eight years in prison for planting a bomb. “I found myself knowing I needed the grace of God and the forgiveness of my sins. For the first time, what Jesus did on the cross became really precious and personally important to me.”

Tarrants, 46, now serves as co-pastor of an interracial Washington church – which he prefers not to identify because he still fears retaliation – and is a noted speaker against racism.

Last year, he spoke at a high school in the Harrisburg, Pa., area against anti-semitism after neo-Nazi activities had been reported there. He told the group, “Hate becomes like a cancer that obsesses you. Anti-semitism is a distortion and misinterpretation of facts.”

He frequently attends an inner-city prayer meeting, and has begun an independent urban ministry.

“I’m far more radical now than I ever was as a KKK member,” Tarrants said. “My radicalism is a reckless abandonment to Jesus Christ, obedience to Him and a lifestyle of love for everyone, no matter what their color.

“I try to be an agent of reconciliation, to get people reconciled to God and to one another. That’s radical.”

“Demonic” is how Tarrants now describes the Klan.

Tarrants wrote his own story several years ago in a book, “Conversion of a Klansman.” But, cautious about seeing his background exploited, unless it is to advance the cause of Christ, he said he doesn’t even own a copy of his book and he declines invitations to appear publicly with Nelson.

Nelson’s new book, “Terror in the Night: The Klan’s Campaign Against the Jews,” relates his experiences as a young reporter covering the racial violence in his home state of Mississippi.

Nelson, Washington bureau chief of the Los Angeles Times and now a close friend of Tarrants’s, said he is asked repeatedly, “How do you know Tarrants is still not a hater?”

“He’s gone straight all these years,” Nelson said. “He’s obviously involved in the Lord’s work now. I guess you have to say that there’s such a thing as redemption.”

Nelson cited the lobbying efforts for Tarrants’s early release by Al Binder, the Jewish leader and lawyer who raised money to pay informants for information about Tarrants, and FBI agent Frank Watts, who wanted to secure Tarrants’s cooperation and testimony to bring other Klan members to trial.

In a telephone interview from Gulf Breeze, Fla., Watts recalled the dramatic change in Tarrants when Watts visited him in solitary confinement. Tarrants threw his arms around him and hugged the man who had called him a “mad-dog killer” and helped convict him.

“At that point, I knew in my heart that there was such a thing as a born-again experience,” Watts said. And remarkably, Watts said, Tarrants’s conversion helped him to become a believer. He said it was as if the Lord said, “’Now do you believe?’ Here it is.” They talk at least once a week by telephone and visit frequently.

In the Washington church where Tarrants serves, he is teaching a class on discipleship. He describes the proper motivation for all service to God as “overflowing gratitude” in response to His love.

One of the Scriptures that Tarrants cited Sunday from the Gospels seemed to encapsulate his odyssey. In Luke 7:47, Jesus rebuked those who took issue with the woman who used her hair to wipe his feet as she anointed them with oil and tears.

Jesus’s response to her critics was, “So I tell you that all her sins are forgiven, and that is why she has shown great love. But anyone who has been forgiven only a little will show only a little love.”

Check out Tom's book [*"He's My Brother: Former Racial Foes Offer Strategy for Reconciliation"*](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0800792149/ref%3Dox_sc_act_title_1?smid=A3EEWH3FKVHHG9&psc=1) he co-authored with John Perkins.

Also, check out this video about Tom's transformation by Michael Ramsden, European director of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, and director of Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetic



[Thomas Tarrants](https://voice.dts.edu/contributor/thomas-tarrants/)

Tom Tarrants was born and raised in Mobile, Alabama. As a high school student in the mid-sixties he opposed the desegregation of the public schools and eventually joined the Ku Klux Klan by the age of 21. After a bloody shoot-out with the police and FBI, in which his partner was killed and he nearly died, he was arrested. Tom was eventually sentenced to thirty years in the Mississippi State Penitentiary. While reading the Gospels in prison, Tom experienced a life-changing conversion to Jesus Christ. He subsequently renounced the Klan, with its racism and hatred, and devoted himself to serving Christ and promoting the love and peace that Christ alone can give. After his release from prison, Tom attended the University of Mississippi, and later attended seminary. After serving twelve years as president and nine years as Vice President for the C.S. Lewis Institute, he retired in June 2019. Tom holds a Master of Divinity Degree, as well as a Doctor of Ministry Degree in Christian Spirituality. He is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Church Alliance and a member of the Evangelical Theological Society.

## **Violent Klansman Who Deserved to Die**

Yet at the height of my segregationist fervor, God showed me mercy.

**THOMAS TARRANTSAUGUST 19, 2019**



Image: Jeff Wojtaszek

Icame of age in the early 1960s, when America was entering a period of political, social, and cultural upheaval. Mobile, Alabama, where I was raised, had been segregated since its founding in 1702. In 1963, reacting to the federally mandated desegregation of Alabama’s public schools, Gov. George Wallace uttered his infamous pledge of “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.” Many white Alabamians, including me, were fearful and angry. White society was in turmoil from top to bottom, and the sense of grievance was strong, adding fuel to a racist, populist wave across the South.

My high school was among the first to be desegregated. Like most people around me, I identified with Gov. Wallace’s courage in standing up to those who were threatening our way of life. On a more personal level, I was angry with my father, alienated from him, and somewhat emotionally troubled. All these factors made me a good candidate for radicalization.

I read some white supremacist, anti-Semitic, anti-Communist literature that was circulating within my high school. Then I met the people who were advocating these ideas. They contended that black people were inferior to whites and that desegregation, by enabling intermarriage, would weaken the white race. The civil rights movement, they said, was part of a Communist plot, and the US government had been infiltrated by Communist agents. Christianity and the Constitution were being undermined, and a secret Jewish conspiracy was behind it all.

All these warnings made me anxious about America’s survival, and my fears soon turned into anger—and eventually hatred—toward those I perceived as America’s enemies. Their successes made me want to ...