

# Meet Mark Mason | Musicianary/Co-Founder & President of Life on the Verge

January 7, 2025



We had the good fortune of connecting with Mark Mason and we've shared our conversation below.

## **Hi Mark, what role has risk played in your life or career?**

Most people want to make progress in life. I think the older we get the more we want to see our unique skills and experiences converge to make the greatest impact. That begins with a vision or a dream of what "could be," If we nurture a "could be" it might just turn into a "should be." If we keep doing all we can where we are with what we have in the direction of a "should be" , it just might morph into a "must be." That's when you know you're willing to

take the big risk(s) necessary to see it come to pass. Crafting vision (a detailed mental picture of a preferred future) and working by faith in the direction of that vision is the hard work many aren't willing to do. It also helps that my wife and I have been married for 42 years and we've always come to agreement about a big risk before taking the leap. We visit the possibility of failure in our imagination. If the potential payoff of the risk outweighs the potential pain of utter failure, we jump. The risk that launched our latest endeavor (Life on the Verge) required letting go of our stuff, dropping our medical insurance and moving into a beat up, leaky travel trailer as our full-time residence for about 18 months. We literally lived hand to mouth just going and doing what we felt the Lord had led us to do. He was opening doors for us to play music and share our redemption story in prisons. We just kept walking through them. The non-profit has grown substantially since we launched in 2011.. That was our biggest risk to date. It took years of smaller risk to gain the confidence for this big risk. I think risk taking works like that. Our confidence grows – not because every endeavor succeeds, but we start to realize failure isn't final. We're proud that we had the guts to do it even if it fails. We start to trust ourselves (and hopefully God) a little more.



**Let's talk shop? Tell us more about your career, what can you share with our community?**

We call ourselves "musicianaries." Most of work involves bringing our band

and other artists/speakers into state penitentiaries for multi-day rock n roll ministry events.

My wife and I served the local church as youth pastors, worship leaders and church planters for 20 years. Prior to that, I was a police officer in Norfolk, VA. My last three years there, I worked in forensics. Seeing the destruction on the streets is what led me to volunteer with a local youth group. I wanted to reach kids with the message that changed my life before they ended up in prison or worse yet a body bag. That led me to study for the ministry. We made the leap into full-time ministry at 32 years old. Let me go back a little further.

My wife and I met in middle school. We dated in high school. We moved into a nasty \$90/month duplex when we were 18. By that time, we'd both been kicked out high school and arrested numerous times. We'd also developed significant drug and alcohol issues. All I can say, is that the God my momma taught me about wouldn't leave me alone. On November 23, 1982 at 19 years old, I knelt beside our bed and cried out for help. Suzan prayed with me that night and we decided to start going to church. One month later we were married. Five years later, I was the first in my family to get a GED and graduate college. Ironically, I would eventually be hired by the very police department that arrested me numerous times as a kid.

During our first full-time stint as youth pastors, we worked at a small church in Hedgesville, WV. My younger brother moved there to help us with the ministry. He had also had a spiritual awakening. He had a deep heart for the outcast. One of the young men he had been trying to help broke into his house one night in 1997 and shot him dead. No motive was ever given. The boy that did it went to prison for life without parole. I'm bringing this up just to show that God must have a sense of humor. My dad went to prison. I almost went to prison but instead spent ten years putting people in prison as

a cop. My brother was the victim of a homicide. It was never, ever in my life plan to do full-time prison ministry.

We spent 20 years working for three different churches but all the while I still had dream to play music. It wasn't about being a rock star. What most musicians want is just to be heard by an audience that appreciates their art. There's nothing like watching a room transform because you shared your craft.

In 2010, for the first time in decades, I started going out to watch local bands, I'd sit in on blues jams and occasionally do an open mic. Eventually, I joined a band while I was still pastoring. I mentioned earlier about how a "could be" can become a "should be" and eventually a "must be" if we nurture a dream. This is what I was doing and eventually my wife and I knew somehow, someday we were going to go into a full-time music thing. I've lived by this truth for a long time, "If you do all you can where you are with what you have God won't leave you where you're at." We had no idea how to bring our big dream to fruition, but we could do something. We could write songs and we could play out locally. There were friends and mentors I could lean on. In 2011, we counted the cost and left our jobs. We moved into a beat up, leaky travel trailer and let go of salaries and medical insurance. We started doing prison ministry events with my new found friend Tony Loeffler of International Solid Rock and ended up launching our own known non-profit Life on the Verge.

Our son Matt Mason (known professionally as Matt Maeson) traveled with us for a couple of years playing his alt-rock acoustic stuff. He wouldn't say a word, he'd just play his original tunes and you'd feel the room shift. He'd either have'em weepin' or dancin'. It was quite obvious from my perspective that he had a tremendous gift. He writes vulnerable authentic stuff and it resonates with a lot of people. He eventually put two songs on YouTube and

ended up getting signed by Atlantic. He's had a couple of platinum singles, Cringe and Hallucinogenics. I was in my 50s when he invited me to play Bonnaroo and Lollapalooza with him. It's been one wild ride. Matt has had some great success for sure. He's been on the road with Zach Bryan for most of 2024. Still, to this day, he says the best shows he's ever played were in prison.

We still spend about seven months out of every year in an RV traveling to prisons across the country. Our mission is to entertain the crowd, edify the incarcerated church, evangelize the lost and equip others for ministry. We strive to do a good job with that first point before we attempt any of the others. In other words, our shows are open to everyone and we guarantee they will be entertained. We do loads of classic rock and blues covers but we also have two albums of our own material to draw from. My wife and I go by the moniker "The Plunders." All of our stuff is on streaming. I guess it'd be classified as classic rock/blues rock.

We're looking forward to three big tours in 2025. Spring, we plan to be in Florida prisons. Over the summer we'll head west for events in Ohio and Montana,. Then in the fall we'll be in Virginia prisons. We're also looking to record a new album in 2025.

Here's a few lessons learned along the way:

1. Sometimes you don't find your calling, you're calling finds you. Just do the next thing over and over.
2. Everyone in prison is not a demon possessed monster.

In fact, virtually everyone that comes to our events are trying to improve. They've come to the end of themselves. They deal with massive condemnation and guilt. They know how many people think about them.

They are in an incredibly vulnerable state. And guess what? Most of them are coming back to our neighborhoods. Do you know why kids shoot each other like cowboys with little care for the consequence? Because they have no hope for a better tomorrow, so why not live for the moment? We do our level best to let inmates know they have worth, they can use their setback for a comeback. We are purveyors of hope. We don't want to just bark at the problem. We want to be part of the solution.

4. I don't like raising money, it's humbling but necessary.

Most churches do not have an organized prison outreach – and it's not easy convincing them to help ours. I can't quite understand that. We receive more financial support from individuals that we've met in bars than we do from some churches. With roughly two-million Americans incarcerated and state pens being within a few miles of most churches, there really isn't a valid excuse for sending missions teams overseas but neglecting the mission-field right under your nose. Sending a retired pastor to the local jail to meet with a few fellas is great. We try to shock and awe the inmates with our A-game. We give them a program they know full well they don't deserve. It's a value declaration to us. We don't always feel like doing it that's for sure. But we want them to look at little deeper at what or who compels us to be there.

4. "If you love what you do, you'll never work another day in you in your life" is a flat out lie. We love what we do more than anything else we've ever done, but we work harder than we've ever worked.

**Any places to eat or things to do that you can share with our readers? If they have a friend visiting town, what are some spots they could take them to?**

If we're talkin' TN, I'd definitely see who's on the bill at the Bridgestone and the Ryman, We'd check out the Bluebird of course. I might know someone who could get us tour of the Gibson factory. We'd spend a night on Broadway and eat at Puckett's 5th & Church or Hattie B's. Maybe we'd do some fine dining somewhere like Audrey on Meridan Street. 'd connect with some friends in the music world and see if we could check out a couple of studios. We'd visit downtown Franklin and have a bite at Gray's On Main. Maybe we'd get to Franklin early and grab some donuts at Ellie's Old Fashioned Donuts. We'd eat a lot:)

**Shoutout is all about shouting out others who you feel deserve additional recognition and exposure. Who would you like to shoutout?**

I have to recognize my wife Suzan! She's the other half of everything we do. Also, we wouldn't be where we are without the mentorship of Jimmie & Sherri Bratcher. Jimmie showed up at my church in 2007 playing blues rock and talking about how he did concerts in prison. I bought his book, "Don't Take Your Dreams to the Grave" and it changed my life. Though I was in my 40's and about to sell off most of my music gear, Jimmie inspired me to dig up an old dream. I began to dream about playing music again. Jimmie became a dear friend and invited us to play on a stage at the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in 2011. That's where I met Tony Loeffler. He is the founder of International Solid Rock in West Palm, FL. Tony is a 50+ year veteran of musicianary ministry in prisons. He and his wife Mary Anne became dear friends and mentors as well. I tell inmates that we need three types of people in our lives



to become all we're meant to be: those we follow (mentors, coaches, etc.), those we walk beside (peers) and those we lead. This applies to all of us not just the incarcerated. I'm 61 years old and I still need mentors and coaches. People like Jimmie Bratcher and Tony Loeffler challenge me, inspire me and help me see my blind spots.

**Website:** lifeontheverge

**Instagram:** @lifeontheverge

**Twitter:** @lifeontheverge1

**Facebook:** lifeontheverge

**Youtube:** lifeontheverge

**Other:** Our music can be found on streaming but we also at [www.theplunders.com](http://www.theplunders.com)









## Image Credits

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