

My Testimony of Salvation

By

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The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one. (Psalms 14:2,3)

As a child growing up in a broken home, in a small rural town, in northwestern Ohio, my grandmother was my rock: solid, stable, loving and concerned for my soul. I still have fond memories of grandma and grandpa dragging me and my three brothers to Sunday school. I'm not sure how long this went on, perhaps a couple of years.

I remember hearing about Noah and the flood, the Exodus, David and Goliath, Samson and Delilah, the gospel, and other Bible stories. This all ended when we moved away from the area to live with dad when I was about 12 years old.

After that I went to church for weddings, funerals, an occasional Christmas service, and to introduce my children to Christ, foolishly believing that my good deeds would ensure my heavenly reward. Most of the stories I'd been taught in Sunday school were easy to understand, but the gospel (good news) confused me. Honestly, from the first time I'd heard about Jesus until my salvation over 40 years later, I didn't fully understand and appreciate how Jesus' life, death and resurrection personally affected me. I mean really, how could someone die for my sins, and why would they? Fortunately, these were unresolved questions I never let go of.

Throughout most of my adult life, I have felt deep remorse for my sins. I was miserable in my sins, but I couldn't, or wouldn't, stop sinning. Over time, my personal, selfish, idolatrous goals of becoming a professional pool player separated me from my family, and especially my children more and more as they grew. I saw what was happening, but I couldn't stop. I refused to let go of my idolatrous goals. The better my pool game got the further my children got from me. It became clear that they were guided by the relative moral compass accepted by today's society and not the absolute God-given morals this great nation was founded on. I was becoming a respected force on the pool tour; becoming the player I'd dreamed of for over 30 years, but at what cost? I was a cold, distant husband and father and this was reflected in my children's lives. (Be careful what you wish for!)

But then something started to happen. The music in the pool halls became more and more disturbing, vulgar, and demonic; I could no longer ignore it. And the countless times I would hear God's name blasphemed actually began to cause physical pain, as if someone were driving nails in my ears each time His name was taken in vain.

As my pool game improved, and I got closer to achieving my goals, I became more aware of the paltry rewards for the huge sacrifice I inflicted on myself and my family. Even when I won a tournament I felt like a loser. I began to realize that the family sacrifices, financial commitment, and hundreds even thousands of hours of practice and

competition per year simply weren't worth it. In December, 2009 I decided to put down my cue for awhile, take a break, and reevaluate my direction in life.

I started thinking about my sins and especially how I was failing my family. Simultaneously, I started thinking about how God sent His only son, Jesus Christ, to die for my sins, and how my sins caused Jesus to suffer even more.

As a father myself, it was overwhelming for me to finally realize that God loves me so much that He gave His only Son to die for me. For me! I'm the father who would rather spend my spare time honing my pool game than spend a few moments with my kids, but Christ went willingly to the cross for me. For me! After forty plus years the gospel finally made sense; its truth was heart wrenching and made my sins even more unbearable. I cried uncontrollably and asked God to forgive me for my sins and the pain they caused Jesus on the cross, my family and so many others. I had prayed for forgiveness before, but this was the first time my prayer was emotionally painful and sincere.

To be clear, I wasn't motivated to seek God for my own guarantee of heavenly rewards. Instead, I was pleading to God that He not punish my children for my sins. When I connected this plea with the realization that God's only Son, Jesus, willingly died on the cross to satisfy His infinitely Holy Father's demand for punishment of my sins, it made me realize just how much God loves me. It was this truth that turned an ordinary, everyday, casual, "walk-an-isle" prayer into a prayer that was truly repentant.

*Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."
(Acts 2:38,39)*

What happened next was completely unexpected. I stopped swearing, had no desire to play pool, and began to drink less alcohol. I became curious about God, Jesus, and His church. I began to pray consistently, and on occasion for the better part of an hour. (Wow, never done that before.) I started to observe the Sabbath in private, and used that time to learn about God. Some of these changes happened fairly rapidly over days or weeks, while others happened gradually over several months and without much effort on my part. Initially, I thought it was a mid-life crisis, so I'd just ride it out and no one would ever be the wiser. However, it didn't take long to realize it was far more than that. There was something different about me. I didn't understand it, but I liked it.

Eventually my wife and kids recognized a change in me, but I still hadn't spoken to anyone about it because I didn't understand it myself. Sadly, within my circle of family and friends, I couldn't think of a single person I could turn to who would understand what I was going through.

Initially, my "spiritual curiosity" was limited to the internet and TV. However, in late June/early July, I finally picked up the Bible and read the Book of Revelations. It's the only book of the Bible that offers a blessing to the reader. (I had read this book once before when I was about 25. It was the only book of the Bible I had read completely and, it was the last time I opened a Bible.)

It was also about this time that I learned of the “indwelling of the Holy Spirit”. (I missed that part in Sunday school.) I’d heard of people being “born again” (and they were to be avoided at all cost), but now not only did I understand what it meant, I was experiencing it.

At this point I still had not stepped foot into a church, but I felt a strong desire to start going; to be around others who would understand what I was experiencing and not be ashamed of it. However, during my research, it became clear that there are a lot of vastly different theologies/religions/churches, and they couldn’t all be right. In fact, just the opposite is true. Consequently, I had good reasons to be concerned about getting involved with the wrong church that would not properly nurture my newly acquired gift.

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matt 7:13, 14)

So, I prayed consistently over several months for God to help me find His church. Over time, my scriptural research and my budding trust in the Holy Spirit convinced me that I could at least discern a sound biblical church from cults, such as: Jehovah Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Catholicism, Mormons, etc. So, I decided to go to a different church every Sunday until I found one that “felt right”. I’m not sure what I was looking for exactly, but I trusted God to lead me to His church.

My first stop was Cornerstone Baptist Church, a small, newly built church, just a few miles from home. Right away I noticed something unusual about this church; it felt alive and I felt at home. Everyone was cheerful, smiling, engaged in conversation, and carrying a Bible. There were a few flowers near the podium, but otherwise no paintings, pictures, statues, crucifixes or other man-made religious symbols of worship. The atmosphere was uplifting and regenerative. I was greeted warmly several times as I worked my way past the small crowd into the sanctuary.

When the singing of praise to God started, I was unable to hold back the tears of joy that I felt. After six months of “spiritual isolation” I was finally around others who would understand what was happening to me. Then the sermon began and the Pastor was in Chapter 6 of Revelations. (I don’t believe in coincidences.) Everyone was flipping through the pages to follow along with the sermon, then someone handed me a Bible. (Wow, they care about my soul.)

His preaching was expository, line by line, verse by verse, and he used other scripture in the Bible to explain the meaning of what each verse was saying. His entire sermon was from the 66 books of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, no other material was referenced or used. He let the Bible speak for itself. God’s Word came alive, it spoke to me and the message was vivid, clear, important, and urgent. This was a church dedicated to the Word of God.

After the sermon, I had a brief conversation and then worked my way through the small crowd. It took me several minutes to reach the door and step outside. I looked in every direction only to realize that I was the first to leave, and there was nobody behind me. It might be a small building, but it’s packed full of the Holy Spirit, bathing everyone inside,

and no one wanted to leave. God answers prayers. This is His church and I'm part of it. Amen!

God's Word was no longer hidden from me. The scales over my eyes had been removed. I started to learn about God's righteous holiness, the truth of His Word, predestination, sanctification, and so much more. But it wasn't someone telling me what to believe, it was the Word of God that came alive to me by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling inside me, forever. This is the gift of spiritual birth by the grace of God for all spiritually dead sinners who sincerely repent and trust in the substitutionary death and resurrection of Jesus Christ with all their heart. Why in the world did it take me so long to understand such a simple truth?

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1Cor 2:14)

About six weeks after my first visit to Cornerstone, I attended a small men's group. After it ended, a brother started up a conversation. I told him I had been saved, but my wife and children were not. It was the first time I had told anyone of my salvation. I was so relieved to finally tell someone that all I could do was cry. He said that happens a lot around here; a true brother.

The certainty of my own salvation is bittersweet because now I'm just as certain of the eternal damnation of my family and friends who are still dead in their sins unless they repent and believe the gospel.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

At first, I questioned why God would save such a sinner as me, especially since I squandered the most influential years of my children's lives. They deserved so much more from me. But, as my faith in God grows and my knowledge of His Word improves, I no longer question His will. Instead, I praise Him and dedicate my remaining years to His service, especially reaching out to His elect who are not yet saved. And I pray you are one of them.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matt 28:18-20)

The Holy Spirit has given me absolute certainty that nearly everyone I know and love will perish in hell if they do not hear the gospel and repent. Not to mention the countless other lost souls I encounter everyday. If I don't reach out to them and warn them of the danger they are in, who will? Who would pass by a burning house and not alert those

inside? Knowing with absolute certainty that “many” will suffer in hell for eternity for sinning against an infinitely Holy God is a tremendous burden on my soul, and one I take very seriously.

If I were 30 years younger I’d ring the tower bell and proclaim my salvation to the entire world. Then convince them of the certain doom ahead unless they change course. Then, after I had been totally rejected by family and friends for my “silly exuberance and passé beliefs”, I would study the Word, develop better debate and reasoning skills, and try again to evangelize all those close to my heart and others.

Instead, at my age, I can approach this in a more sophisticated and clever manner. I have mature relationships with intelligent people. Surely I can convince them that they are accelerating towards an eternity in hell, burning and suffering for ever and ever, with no escape, no ending. In a body that can feel pain but never die, never sleep, never rest, never feel comfort, never satisfied, always suffering, forever and ever.

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (Rev 21:7,8)

Every suffering moment in eternity the damned are reminded of the gift they rejected for fear of losing their relationships, their current life-style, or their very life; of being ostracized and ridiculed, just as Crist was.

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:24-26).

I must convince them that the words I speak about the gospel are from the Holy Spirit who lives in me, guides me, and shows me the truth. However, I suspect it would be better to ring the tower bell now and get it over with, sooner rather than later. That way I can move on more quickly to find God’s elect.

There is divine power in the very words of the Bible, but only if you read it.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (Rom 1:16)

Do not delay because God’s grace will not last forever.

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and

with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2Thes 2:9-12)

Grandpa died when I was 16, but grandma died only a few years ago, she was 94. It was a peaceful death that mirrored her life. I visited her in hospital during her final days. Her body was weak but her mind was still vigorous and full of youth. I wasn't saved at the time, but I told her I was grateful to her for introducing me to Christ. I'll see grandma again and, God willing, you'll be there too.