

Salvation Testimony

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Throughout my childhood, we moved a number of times. We lived in multiple towns in Montana, Alaska, Idaho and North Dakota. I was raised in a family who attended church each Sunday, or sometimes Saturday, depending on the denomination of the church we picked out upon coming to our new location. Most were charismatic, with a church-community focus. This encouraged loyalty to attendance, fellowship among members, and a positive outlook/feeling after each topical sermon. As a child, I assumed I was a Christian, as my parents were. I knew most of the major Bible stories and could sing all the children's songs from Sunday school, plus- I was a good kid. That (surely) amounted to me being a Christian.

The summer after my freshman year in high school I attended a church camp up near Glacier National Park. It was a great time of fellowship and adventure and each evening we attended a gathering where the Pastor would preach and offer a chance to be saved. I had heard similar altar calls many times in our home church and would smile as all the people went up to start their life as a Christian. At camp, it was the same feeling for these teens all around me. The (mislead) happiness in me was so excited that they were heading for this 'life of bliss' in trade for their 'mundane [non-Christian] lives'. (I clearly didn't have a grasp of sin and the affects it has on this world and the people in it.) That week, the Thursday-night sermon caught my attention. Suddenly the spotlight was on ME. My attention was pulled inward as I was allowed to face the fact that I was a sinner. As in present tense. Yes, I was vaguely aware of the 'little mistakes' I may have made in the past, but my focus had always been on 'not breaking the commandments' for my future actions. Those were the rules of 'being good'. This unveiling of my current and regular sin was devastating. I wasn't good.... I was profoundly BAD! I needed to change. I needed 'to accept Jesus' into my heart and make that decision to raise my hand and become a 'real Christian'. So I did. And my life since has been the bliss that I 'knew' came after conversion.

Clearly a life of bliss isn't what came (nor is it what was promised to me. Only I didn't fully understand what was promised to me.) I continued attending church. I faithfully went to youth group each week. I prayed and sang worship songs. I committed to purity until marriage. I worked hard and was involved in many activities and community groups. I tried and tried and tried to 'do everything right'. Of the things I knew were 'bad', I tried to dodge. If I 'messed up', I would feel crushed because I let God and the world around me down- "Is that really how a Christian acts?!". I was a disappointment. My salvation didn't feel secure. I prayed the 'sinners prayer' over and over, asking God into my heart, to be born again. And again. And again.

I believed I was solely responsible for my life path. Every decision was super weighted. Every 'mistake' was added to the pile of guilt that I pulled behind me. So I tried harder. And failed bigger. This pattern in life followed me through college and into young adulthood. I was raised to commit and work hard in all I do. The further my weakness pulled me from a life with Christ, the more my pile of weight and guilt built. Which meant I needed to work harder. I poured myself into others and into 'doing the right thing'. Only 'the right thing' was determined by my circumstances around me and the options available, (rather than by God's Word or the convicting Spirit within me). There was definitely a part of me that knew what I was doing was not in line with a Godly life, but if I kept trying, committing, going to church, and praying, surely I was doing enough to 'maintain my Christianity'.

Despite all my efforts, life was spinning wildly out of control. I was in a relationship with a non-believer, raising his young child, and feeling lost and stuck in all areas of my life. Finally, one summer day, the Lord allowed a devastating circumstance to happen, which changed my life path 180 degrees. He answered my prayers in so many ways. Conversion happened. I can tell you, bliss did not happen, but peace, which only comes from HIM, did. Despite the difficulty of wading through the consequences of where I had been, I knew I was not alone.

The Lord God gave me the power to change. He saved me, He sustained me, He kept pulling me back to a healthy path of loving Him every time I sinned or fell into old life patterns. It was GOD's strength I needed all along. I needed to submit to HIS power and authority and accept my human weakness. He gave me the understanding that my life was not my own. I needn't not merely 'accept Jesus', I needed to give my life to Him. He is mine and I am His. He bought me for a price, and although I didn't fully understand that at the time, I KNEW that my life needed to be in HIS hands.

Through a trail only God could weave, my now-husband, Zech, and I met back up after not dating for a few years. The (worldly) timing felt all wrong. However, a peace was given to each of us about pursuing a relationship. We sought counsel and advanced our friendship to a state of courting and then engagement. This time around, our relationship was sustained by our commonality of God's love. We pledged abstinence until marriage in our obedience to God. Six months later, we wed as a cord of three.

God continued to grow me and show me more of Him and the direction in which He would take us. Zech and I attended a charismatic church, similar to the one I attended with my parents. Growth was slow as my time in the Word was minimal. I didn't have a grasp of the need for the Bible. It had always served as a resource for verse quotes or Bible stories for sermons, of which 1-2 verses would be displayed on a projector screen Sunday mornings and a nice message preached about them and how they pertain to modern life. We would leave 'feeling good' and glad to have seen fellow believers each week, but we were not growing much in our walk. Admittedly, it was even pretty easy to miss a Sunday here and there, even though we loved our church family as much as we did. (We didn't understand the need for corporate worship, and were not being fed enough to even recognize an appetite for God's Word.)

Fast forward 5-6 years and our first born son is starting school. It was important to Zech and myself that he be taught in a Christian environment and we were blessed that our small town offered one at a Bible Church. Our friends already had children enrolled, so it was an easy lead to follow. Our son's loyalty to our 'home church' made him a bit uncomfortable to attend the weekly chapel held in the sanctuary of the parent-church. To demonstrate our acceptance of him being in the new church environment, we took him to a Sunday morning service. It was not our intent to visit more than the one Sunday. Upon our arrival, we were greeted by people who showed such kindness. They had a love and peace about them, the way the older people at our past churches did. An 'old-fashioned Christian' feel, like the weight of the modern world wasn't pushing around and down on them. I felt like it was a 'very traditional' church- "What an even better place for my son to be! Those old-fashioned morals and beliefs would lead him in a straight and proper education." Worship was led by a few musical instruments and consisted mostly of the ol' hymns from the original songbooks. Whoa. We're talking old-fashioned for sure! I was used to rocking out with 'modern, updated music', whereas Zech was grinning ear to ear to have the Hymnals out. Then when we sat down for the sermon, I looked across the congregation and over 90% of them had Bibles flipping open on their laps! Bibles!! They still toted their old leather bound books to church every week! I was shocked! -And changed. Conviction hit hard and it set in that all of those practices and differences were what were missing in our lives. I left the church starving for more. I couldn't wait until the next week. And the next. And next. I even had the excitement and drive to open my Bible on weekdays, let alone my new practice of following along in mine in church each Sunday.

Having the blessed opportunity to attend a Christ-centered, Bible teaching church has opened my heart and eyes to growth and maturity in the Word and in my relationship with God. It has taught me of Christ's sacrificial love and His gift of being saved because of HIS plan and follow-through. I am saved because of HIM, not because of my efforts 'to be good'. His blood has washed me clean of my sins- past, present, and future. I do not have to doubt my salvation- He has given it to me by His merit, not my own.

I still haven't found a 'perfect life of bliss' as a Christian, and I know I won't, this side of heaven. But God has brought me on an incredible journey of being known by Him and getting to know Him. I have strides left to go and hope He grants me the opportunities to grow closer to Him each and every day. Being in His Word, praising Him for His eternal goodness, and heartfelt, honest prayer-time with Him are my responsibilities for this. He provides more opportunities through both His blessings and trials. Mostly through the trials- those incredibly hard times I have had and will face in life. Knowing and trusting in His goodness, I am anchored by His love and have a peace which sustains me through those challenging times. So in actuality, I thank Him for not granting me a 'life of bliss' from the start of my walk with Him.