

# Salvation Testimony

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What's the purpose of life, where did everything come from, and what happens when I die? These were the questions that directed me towards saving faith in Jesus Christ. I would like to share with you my story and how I found the answers to these questions.

I was born in a small town in Northern California called Ukiah. I was raised in somewhat of a Christian home. My parents were part of a Pentecostal denominational church, so I was raised around some very interesting religious practices. As a child I made a profession of faith but did not fully understand the gospel until February 15<sup>th</sup> 1998. That was five days before my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and I had been invited to go to a winter camp. The preacher proclaimed the gospel and I understood that God was Holy and that I was not and that my only hope for pardon and forgiveness of my sins is found in Jesus Christ alone. I was broken before God and repented of my sins and trusted in Christ's work and payment on behalf of my sin. Since then, my life has been blessed beyond all measure though the kindness of the Lord.

The questions that directed me toward saving faith in Jesus Christ began to run through my mind when I was in high school but the events leading up to those questions is really where my story begins. As a child, I had very few friends. Having the last name, "Dick" was very difficult. I was constantly bullied and teased by other kids. The environment of the public-school system at times can be very hard for children. One thing I looked forward to every week was going to church Sunday School, I loved learning about Jesus. I learned from the Bible that Jesus said, "Treat people the same way you want them to treat you." (Matt 7:12) This was hard for me to apply because when I would try and be nice and treat others the way that I wanted to be treated, it never seemed to work, because I kept getting teased. I remember times after school walking home, and a kid would run by and painfully punch me in the gut. I can't tell you how many times going home and crying my eyes out to my mom, telling her that I just wanted to quit being picked on and that I wanted to have friends. I hated my last name.

It was Christmas morning December 25<sup>th</sup>, 1989 all my family was together at my aunt's house in Sacramento. I woke up a little earlier than everyone else to go and peek at the Christmas presents. Stopping by the bathroom on my way downstairs, I opened the door to find my grandpa asleep on the floor. Not understanding why he was sleeping there, I went and asked my Aunt if she could wake him up. Papa was not asleep but had died of a heart attack. That was a really rough Christmas for the family. About a year later, my Grandmother also passed away. The deaths of my grandparent's really affected my father which really affected his church attendance. He thought that it was not fair of God to take his parents away at such a young age. My grandparents were only in their early 60's. My father wanted me and my younger sister and brother to grow up having grandparents. During this time, my mom continued to go to church and had many people praying for our family.

My father was my role model. When he stopped going to church, I started to question why I should be going to church. If God wasn't important to my father anymore, then why should God be important to me? I decided to follow suit and make a change in my life. I made a change for the worse. All the hurt, anger, and bitterness bottled up inside from the bullying during my childhood had been building up and it all started to come out. I went from being a "good kid" to becoming a horrible kid. During my Jr. high years, I started fighting a lot. I thought that since I had always been picked on because of my last name, it was now my turn to get revenge and pick on everyone who had picked on me. I started getting in trouble at school and became very disobedient to my parents at home. My grades went down the drain and I hung out with the wrong group of guys. These guys taught me how to fight, how to cuss, introduced me to pornography, and to drugs and alcohol.

The summer going into High School my mother begged and pleaded with me to go to this Christian summer camp. I didn't want to go but the thought of girls being there and playing basketball lured me in. I went and had a great time but the only thing that I didn't like was the chapel part. One evening while the pastor was preaching, another kid and I were in the back of the chapel talking and being distracting. The pastor stopped his message, got our attention, and asked us to be quiet. That can be a little embarrassing when you have a large crowd of people all turn around and look at you. When the service was over, the pastor came up and asked if he could talk with me. We talked for a bit and then he said that he would like to pray for me. While he was praying, I had my eyes open and was just looking around. All of the sudden he stopped, opened his eyes, looked at me and said, "I really feel that God is going to call you into the ministry and that you are going to lead people older than you and younger than you to the Lord." When he said this, it really freaked me out. I thought to myself, "who does this guy think he is, trying to make some prediction on my life." In fact, it scared me and made me not want to be around Christians anymore.

As I went into high school, I found that I really enjoyed playing sports. I played football, basketball, and baseball and liked bull riding in local rodeos. In high school I mellowed out a little too and stopped getting into so many fights. Through playing sports, I started to make new friends, but this did not change my sinful lifestyle. I continued partying and fornicating. I was popular at school and had a lot of friends that were out of high school that were 21 years old that would buy me whatever this "under-ager" wanted. I kind of became like a hook up guy that threw parties. In other people's eyes I was cool and looked like I had it all together. Even though I had the friends, sports, girls, parties, drugs, you name it, inside I knew I was missing something.

One night during my junior year of high school I was watching a basketball game, I had a lot on my mind and was distracted from watching the game. I got up and left the gym and found an isolated place to sit down and be alone and away from everyone. As I sat there, I began to think about my life, my future, and my purpose in this world. These three big questions kept coming up in my mind: What's the purpose of life, where did everything come from, and what happens when I die? I sat there for quite some time just thinking. I laid down flat on my back, looking up at the stars, and another question came to my mind, "Is there really a God?" I thought for a long time and I remembered looking up into the sky saying, "God, if You're really out there, would You somehow get my attention." I left there that night not really giving a second thought to my reflective evening. Until about a week later when a very close friend of mine was killed in an automobile accident.

Josh's death messed me up. I couldn't stop thinking about it. I remembered the times he and I had shared and the many different talks we had. The one thing that kept haunting me was something that I had learned back in church Sunday School when I was a kid. I'd learned that if you didn't know Jesus and had not asked him to forgive your sins, then you couldn't go to heaven. This bothered me because I knew that Josh was not a Christian and didn't know Jesus. This made me question myself to see if I knew Jesus. Deep down inside I knew that I did not. A couple weeks prior to Josh's death, he and I were at a party. I remember that night standing down at the river's edge having a conversation about God. Josh asked me what the point of life was and with a beer in hand, I held it up and said "right here bro, the point of life is to party" We came to the conclusion that we just wanted to have fun while we were young and that when we got older and had families, then we would go to church and get ourselves "right with God." Well Josh was too late, he never got the chance to get himself "right with God." A bible verse that I had learned in church Sunday School kept haunting me. It was Jesus's words from the Gospel of Mark 8:36-37 "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" Josh's death and this verse is what God used to convict me of my sin and eventually bring me to repentance. All these thoughts and feelings I kept inside and did not tell anyone. I went to school pretending like everything was okay and that nothing was wrong but deep down inside I felt helpless, empty, and very alone.

Throughout all these years, my mother was still going to church and had been continually praying for me. On February 15, 1998 her prayers were answered. I went to a church winter camp and was sitting in the chapel listening to the preacher. The pastor's words opened my eyes to see how much Jesus loves me by taking my death penalty and dying in my place on a cross for my sins. At the end of the service, I knew I needed to ask God for His forgiveness for my sins. I wanted to live my life for Him and no longer for myself. The pastor asked if there was anyone that would like to believe and trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior to then raise their hand. I raised mine and then he said that if you raised your hand to come walk up to the front of the chapel. When he said that, I put my hand down as fast as I could. I did not want to get up in front of everyone there. The pastor then dismissed everyone to leave. As I was walking out, a counselor came up to me and said that she had noticed that I put my hand down when the pastor invited those to walk up to the front. I talked with the counselor briefly and as I stood up to leave, she asked if she could pray for me. I said that was fine and she started praying. As she was praying I started to feel like goose bumps all over me, I looked up at her and she stopped her prayer, opened her eyes, looked right at me and said with a big smile, "I really feel that God is going to call you into the ministry and that you are going to lead people older than you and younger than you to the Lord."

When she said this, I was absolutely shocked. What she said triggered my remembrance of what the pastor from that summer camp had said to me years ago. I instantly remembered back to the prayer I had just recently said to God that night up at the high school: "God, if You're really out there, would You somehow get my attention." I knew that God was using this moment to get my attention. It felt as if He was reaching down from heaven and wrapping His arms around me and confirming this prayer. That evening came, and I went up to the front of the chapel and asked God to forgive me of my sins and I committed my life to live for Him and no longer for myself all the rest of my days.

That day, my life was changed! I became somebody new, my desires and passions changed. My addictions, insecurities, sinful lusts, and anger were broken. A love and conviction for Jesus Christ and serving Him became my new purpose and fulfillment. God is amazing! He has given me a new life and the promise of heaven with Him, forever. By His grace He has ordained that my mother's prayer was to come true and that I would also have the privilege "to lead people older than me and younger than me to the Lord." I have been blessed to receive formal Bible training and many opportunities in Christ's church to serve His saints through the different talents and abilities He has given to me. He has abundantly blessed with me with a godly wife and four beautiful children. He has trained me through the gift of trials to humble me and show me how great He is and worthy to be praised.

When I was a young man asking the big questions: What's the purpose of life, where did everything come from, and what happens when I die? The Lord has answered my questions, and the answer is: Himself! The purpose of our lives is to glorify God. "You are not your own, for you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body." (1 Cor. 6:2) Everything comes from God. "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36) When you die you will stand before the Lord and give an account. "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." (Hebrews 9:27) I pray my story has caused you to think of your own story, have you come to know the answers to those 3 challenging questions? I ask you to consider your soul, pray to God, ask His forgiveness, surrender your will to His, read your Bible, find a good church and live love.