

Testifying to the Saving Power of Jesus Christ

Mary White

I'm humbly grateful to be alive at age 67. It has taken me until now to discover the truth of Corrie Ten-Boom's statement, "There is no pit so deep but God is deeper still."

When I was 40 I sought therapy for the wreckage left from an abusive childhood. For almost two years I kept a journal where I processed and recorded the horror of my formative years. Recently I read through my "Journal to Recovery". It seems such a distant memory that it could have happened to someone else but it didn't. It's mine. As hard as I tried and sometimes succeeded to live above and beyond the pit of my childhood it seemed the pit still waited to swallow me.

I accepted Christ as a child of 4 or 5. I was sitting in the church bench feeling left out because I was too young to take communion in the Catholic Church. Somehow I knew that those who were allowed were "receiving Jesus" and I wanted to make Him my own as well. I became aware of a Presence that came and sat beside me and I felt a warm arm enfold my shoulders. I heard His voice then. He said, "You don't have to go up there to receive me. I'm right here." Some have questioned this experience but my childlike heart simply accepted it. I was filled with happiness. I remember hearing my mother say to grandma on the phone, "I don't know what's got into the child. She sings songs to Jesus all day long. "

Life wasn't kind to me, as my Journal to Recovery starkly reminded me. Years of rejection, punishment and heartache ended with abandonment into seven years of foster care. I couldn't equate the life I lived to the love of God and one day I announced to my best friend, "I don't believe in God." I was a senior in high school and I was sure I preferred the coldness of atheism to the confusion of abuse and broken promises. I married at 18 and joined a Lutheran Church with my husband. There a wonderful German Lutheran Pastor spent hours with me exploring the Bible and speaking to me about Jesus Christ. I was well versed from 10 years in Catholic schools and Pastor never asked me if I was a Christian. I prefaced most of my answers with "I was taught" not "I believe" but I was accepted as a member of the church.

I always had a crucifix hanging in my bedroom even when I officially disbelieved. One day my four year old daughter skipped into the room when I was making the bed. She said, "Who is that man on the cross, Mommy?" I answered with what I had been taught. "That is Jesus who died for the bad things we do." My child skipped on out of the room and I heard a voice in my spirit clearly say, "Don't say it if you don't believe it."

A few weeks later a Billy Graham crusade played on afternoon television. Billy preached on conscience, calling it a triple pointed spear that pricks and pierces us when we disobey God. He said this conscience would trouble us until we found the cure for sin, Jesus Christ; that if we asked Jesus to forgive our sins and make us clean before God He would. Billy told me, as I told my child, Jesus died on the cross to pay the sin price and rose again from the dead so that we could have a living Savior. I had no emotional response to Billy's message but it made sense to me and I still remembered the voice in my spirit saying, "Don't say it if you don't believe it." That summer afternoon I knelt in my living room and asked Jesus Christ to be my Savior. I apologized for rejecting Him and asked Him to reveal Himself to me. I was 23.

I began to read the Bible in earnest and to spend time in prayer. God confirmed my salvation with dreams and visions that remain as vivid today as when I received them. In one dream I saw the heavens rolled back like a scroll and I knew I was looking into eternity. Then the heavens closed with a rushing waterfall. Later that day as I opened the Bible I read in Ezekiel 43:2 And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and His voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory. I was thrilled and amazed. God was revealing Himself as I had prayed. Another time I dreamed I was standing out in a field watching a blood red sunset when a huge cross was lowered from Heaven. On the cross was my suffering Savior. When the cross was directly above me I looked up into the face of Love itself. I don't know if it was the suffering of Christ or His love that broke me but I woke sobbing, deeply affected. It was summer and everything around me seemed fresh and new and vibrant with life. Love came easily to me and I enjoyed wonderful times with my little ones and with my husband.

I wish I could leap to happily ever after but there were hard times as well. After the rush of first love I was besieged with condemning thoughts and vicious anger against those who had hurt me as a child. I didn't understand. Billy Graham had promised me the peace that passes understanding and I was in a fight for my sanity. I called Pastor Schedler and asked to see him. We talked for a while and then I asked him a question that made him startle. I asked, "Pastor, how do you know when the voice in your head is from God or from the devil?" Pastor literally did a little jump in his chair. He said, "My dear child, after all the time we spent talking I missed a very important truth with you. Always remember, if a thought leads you to the cross and to your Savior you can know it's from God. If a thought tries to drive you away from Jesus it is not from God. God is love and God will always lead you with love."

Things improved for me after that. My husband and I raised three beautiful children together in the faith. We celebrated Christmas and Easter with great joy. I led Bible studies and ministered to the lost and hurting. I

affiliated with Lutheran, Open Bible, and Pentecostal Churches and my faith grew in every one of them. My husband and I celebrated our 25th anniversary by renewing our vows on Sunday morning in church. We had some struggles but our life to this point was good and undeniably blessed.

I remember reading the book of Job but never did I expect to be tested as he was. I began to sense a chilling animosity from my husband shortly after our 25th anniversary. We had some disagreements that were never resolved and it festered away at our life together. Then my husband developed heart problems and with it came a dark depression. Suddenly I could do nothing right. I was misinterpreted at every turn. He turned on me with an unrelenting hatred so deep it had to be demonic. When verbal abuse and neglect didn't break me he turned to physical punishment. I begged him to get help; to get counseling with me. I prayed for him and begged God to restore our marriage. Finally, I asked God to let me leave. Five long torturous years later I was released. After 35 years of faithfulness I embraced a word I swore would never be in my vocabulary: divorce. Almost every ounce of support I had from friends, from family and from church was withdrawn but God is faithful. He always leaves a remnant – a thread to keep us from sliding off the face of the earth. I didn't repeat the error of my youth. In my deepest grief I have this to my credit and to the credit of God's saving grace: I did not reject my God.

My Job's period didn't end with the divorce. I had about seven years reprieve in which I moved to Maine, became reestablished and remarried. I was enjoying my life with Roy and my livelihood as a nurse. We found a sweet church and a few friends. Then life again took a tailspin that lasted seven years more. We lost everything we had rebuilt and I wondered if even God had finally abandoned me.

Easter of 2014 became my resurrection and a turning point for me. More catastrophes followed but the door was opening for me spiritually. God put a prayer sister from Texas in my life through a contact on the internet. As we talked on the phone and prayed together I began to understand my journey from God's perspective. Cindy reminded me of many things I had forgotten or laid aside. Most of all she praised the love of God so sincerely I began to believe again that He loved even me. In August of 2014 God made me aware of Grace Family Church, AG. He nudged me as I drove by and spoke to my heart to check it out. One visit is all it took to make me part of the family here.

Everyone who knew me as a child said, "She's so sweet, so quiet, so easy, so pliable." Little did they know that anything less wasn't safe. At Grace Family Church I have finally found a place where it is safe to admit that I am less; maybe not so sweet or quiet or easy or pliable. Maybe I don't get it right sometimes. Maybe I get angry or lazy or overwhelmed or selfish. Maybe I need help.

Throughout my Christian life I have to admit to rarely feeling a part of the church. Some residual from my past left me convinced I didn't belong. Sometimes it takes a walk through hell like Job's to crack the shell on what we're holding back. God's love is fierce as well as tender and He won't quit until we are wholly His. Finally, I have found a people who are flawed and blessed like me; who having found Christ; reach out to others with His love and forgiveness. And finally, I am able to receive it. What relief!

Although I lived triumphantly through several seasons of my life it is only now that I am experiencing true victory in Christ. I am transparent with God and with His people and I'm able to surrender my struggles to their loving grace. He is fulfilling His word in me that says, "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you." 1Peter 5:10

**And this: For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.
Romans 8:18**

The things that God has prepared for those who love Him do not minimize our suffering. They maximize the joy that awaits us. As Corrie Ten-Boom said, God is showing Himself deeper than any pit the enemy can dig; not only deeper but greater, better, more and amazingly more!

With all my heart I thank God for creating me, calling me and keeping me. I thank God that He sent His Son to die for me, to pay my sin price and promise me Heaven. I thank God for the Spirit of Christ Who dwells within me, making me complete, establishing, strengthening and settling me. And I thank you, my Church, for the work of love you embrace here as a true family. Thank you for being ordinary wonderful saints and for letting me be one of you.

Father God, I thank You for my life and for the testimony You have made of it. I pray You bless each one here and each one You are bringing. Make of us a testimony to Your faithfulness. Make of us a testimony to Your love and to the work of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Make us laborers in Your harvest field and may Your Kingdom come. Amen.

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