

This is a story of my journey from frustration, discouragement, and despair to sweet rest and joy in the saving and transforming power of Christ. What I have learned has made such a difference in my life that I have to share it with every other seeker after the righteousness of Christ.

I don't know about you, but I want more out of my Christianity than being forgiven, justified, cleansed and declared just as if I had never sinned.

I'm sure that would shock some people because justification, which I partially described above is vital to salvation, but there's more, much more that God longs to give His children and I want that too.

Besides needing to be justified I also need to experience God's power in my life; daily changing the kind of person I am, (sanctification) and I need Him to be my 'very present help in time of trouble'.

What this means is that along with justification I need God to provide sanctification, and I need to

know He's so close that even a silent prayer brings the help I need.

There is real delight in a relationship with God that's built on gratitude, trust and reliance on Him. Such an experience brings a person so close to God that praise is a natural result. Praise and gratitude from a heart that's in God's hands brings joy to His heart. God delights in answering the prayer of His children, He delights in a heart that's surrendered to Him, He delights in fixing what's broken in us and teaching us to delight in Him. He delights in praise that comes from a heart filled with love and gratitude, not just for what He does for us but for Who He is.

We have probably all have thought, at one time or another, that wealth would make us happy, that if we didn't have to struggle so much we would be content. But, each day we find that instead of our ship having come in we have missed the boat. We

seem to be always seeking and never finding. Could it be that we're looking for the wrong treasure and in all the wrong places? This was true for me in my spiritual life, until I finally did find the Pearl of Great Price, the Way of Gladness. The relief and joy that comes with this discovery can't be described it must be lived.

When I first committed my life to God I really did so with love and gratitude, and the desire to serve Him. During the years that followed I had huge ups and downs. I would have periods of struggling to do what God wanted me to do, sometimes doing pretty well, I thought, and other times wondering why I couldn't get it right. I would pray about a particular thing in my life, resolve to overcome the temptation to give in to it and try hard not to fail. But fail I did, over and over, day after day, prayer after prayer. Finally I would just give up and leave the whole issue alone, but eventually it

would come back to nag me. Then filled with guilt, disgusted with myself, I would go through it all again. These weren't the huge 'ugly' sins that you might suspect that I was fighting; they were things like appetite, attitude, and lack of power to change myself. I would swing from being squeaky conservative in everything to giving up and just doing whatever seemed easy. Mostly though, in my desire to be 'right with God' I leaned hard to the conservative legalistic side.

I was going about things all wrong. I was trying for results without doing what it took to get them. It would be like reading about growing apples, buying fertilizer and apple picking equipment, preparing the orchard, and agonizing over the fact that you are growing no apples, trying everyday to think of a way to grow them, even pleading for apples to grow, but never planting an apple tree.

I eventually became so discouraged that I was convinced I could never be saved. Just look at me! Anyone could see that I had no victory in my life, and without that there was no hope for me. I still intended to live the ‘Christian life’ and try to lead others to the Lord, but had no hope for myself. It was the darkest hole I have ever been in. I reached out to family, pastors, anyone I thought could help me, but no one knew what to do or say. I don’t recall any defining moment when hope came alive again. God just never let the hope die out, and kept me clinging to scripture promises until I was back to being a ‘functioning Christian’ again.

During the years that followed I went through several personal tragedies. By the grace of God I made it through them, but each one took its toll until I was emotionally, mentally and physically exhausted. My father had died, my best friend had died in a car accident that I was in with her. My

marriage was over, children were wounded and scattered and I lost my job because I couldn't function.

During the next three years I fell flat on my face in the mud. I made frighteningly stupid decisions that should have turned my Christian friends against me, or so I thought, but thank God that didn't happen.

It's amazing that you can be living your life in ways that are opposite everything you believe, and still go to church, but that's just what I did. I THANK GOD, that He loved me through the arms, tears and love of my Pastor and church family. Only two people in my church turned against me, when I expected them all to do so.

I only ever saw love mixed with sadness, and unconditional love in the eyes of my church family and my pastor. He asked if he could be my dad and I

gratefully accepted. When I made really stupid, self destructive choices he just loved me. When my actions deeply disappointed him, he just loved me. When I was in pain I couldn't bear, he bore it with me and loved me. My church family did the same. They acted as if I had not sinned, as if it were not my fault I was suffering! I will love those people till the day I die because I saw Jesus in their eyes, in their hugs, in their unconditional love for me.

Though I hate all that I did and all that I suffered, I will always be grateful to have experienced God's love as I did through those wonderful people.

I was so beaten down by all I had gone through I had nothing left. I didn't even have the strength to read the Bible or pray. All that was left was to throw myself into God's arms and let go. If only I had known that's all He wanted from me in the first place! I stopped struggling with myself because I had no strength left to struggle. I stopped worrying

about it because I knew I was helpless to fix anything. From then on it had to be Him because there was nothing left of me.

In the midst of all this pain, on a day that I was in such agony that I couldn't stop crying and could hardly breathe, I lay in bed begging God to help me. He spoke words of release in my mind, stopped the crying, and flooded me with peace that has never left. There has still been pain in my life since then, but no matter what happens the peace is always still there. Though I had peace, and praised God for it, I still hadn't found all that God had waiting for me.

As I look at my own life and the lives of most of the Christians around me, I see people trying for results which are always just out of reach. We want victory over sin; we want power to live godly lives, have joy in the Lord and experience peace. Oh, how we want peace! We plead with God to help us to overcome, to help us to want the right things, and we

hope that if we combine those prayers with our own efforts then victory will be ours.

It may seem to work for a while, if we try really hard, but then we are weak or forget to pray. Our efforts never take us as far as we want them to, and we give up trying for a while. I know there are people whose upbringing and self discipline seem to get them where they need to be, but I suspect there are many things in themselves they know they can't change and that they need the power of God in their lives as much as the rest of us do.

I don't know about you but this life of struggle and failure isn't the kind of spiritual life I envisioned when I accepted Jesus as my Savior. It's the life I've led, but not the one I wanted.

The good news is that the Good News can change all that. It's not the hard walk, the painful giving up of things, the decisions too hard to make,

that you may fear it to be. It's the fullness of the Gospel as you may never have understood it to be.

You will wonder why it took so long to find the path and be amazed at the utter relief you feel. When I first discovered it I was almost giddy with relief and joy, and every day that I experience it is filled with relief, restfulness, and wonder! I still have days when the world tries to cave in on me, when everything seems to be falling apart around me, but the underlying joy and peace, and assurance of God's presence never leave, they are never shattered, though it sometimes feels like they must be.

If you want to live a life of victory that you've come to think is not possible for you, if you want to experience real joy, real peace and real relief, come with me and find Saving Grace.

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