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A Brief Testimony, How I Became a Christian

It might be meaningful to share something of my own spiritual background. Too often in Christian meetings, sharing among the people, what I call “God talk” rarely occurs. Personal testimonies ought to be an important part of every meeting but alas they are not. I will share a few key events that highlight chapters in my own 'God quest.' With the passing of years, we gain perspective. We can see more clearly how God was at work preparing us through our life's circumstances. He prepares us through trials and adversity, to believe and eventually believe and acknowledge Jesus (Yeshua) as savior and Lord. So I will highlight the principal events that brought me into belief in Jesus. The collection of works linked above are the fruit of my experience as a believer.

From the beginning it is God who does the work in us to draw us to himself. Becoming a believer is a supernatural process. The Holy Spirit of God softens our dark, rebellious nature and plants a new nature within us. The prophets call this the gift of a “new heart” which possesses the knowledge of the Truth. It does not take long to discover that the “Spirit of Truth” given to believers is at variance to the truth accepted by the world. This world, even with all of its religions, is nevertheless under the control of the “evil one,” *the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air.*

Paul, the apostle, declared in his letter to the Romans (Chapter 1 v.13) and to the Corinthians (Ch.1v18) that the Gospel is the **power** of God to those who believe. It is only that supernatural power that can do the work of delivering us from the deception and bondage of this world. giving us a new heart and a transformed mind. The power of Christ breaks Satan's power to bind us with addictions and fear. It is God's power through Christ Jesus who is the healer, the deliverer, the font of knowledge, and the promise of eternal life.

The testimony of how God worked in my life in a miraculous way is not unlike those of others who know that they were touched and changed powerfully. The great song by Bill Gaither expresses this wonderfully, “He Touched Me.” The Spirit of God through Christ Jesus is busy touching and transforming hundreds in the world each and every day as people discover that “Whoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved. *Joel 2:32 “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered.”*

I am blessed that the Lord has allowed me to *experience* some of the realities of heavenly (Spiritual) things and to validate the reality of accounts written in the early days of the church by Messiah's apostles who wrote to instruct and encourage all believing disciples. God is today as he was then, “*the same yesterday, today and*

forever.” God is very active today, and is still doing mighty exploits all over the world in this very hour for those who do not limit Him. Some Christians follow denominational traditions that disallow the power to experience God today. This doctrine is called “cessationism.” Church goers are apt to follow the teachings they hear from the pulpit. Often times what is being taught does not line up with the truth of the Bible. Unbelief can come from teachers who were themselves taught incorrectly. Hosea 4v6 tells us that God's people “are destroyed by lack of knowledge.”

One of the evidences of the transformed spirit is the discovery that the Bible itself is a divinely authored book that can be fully relied upon. Worldly unbelievers continue to label the Bible as fable and unreliable as a source of knowledge. Additionally, a proof that someone has been reborn by the Spirit's power are moved to love and study the Word. Those who are not so inclined might question whether they have received this authentic *new life*. Those not so inclined may question they have received the authentic newness of life taught by Jesus Christ.

It is important that we understand that Salvation is the greatest among the Gifts of God as recorded in the Gospels. The gift, freely given from God, touches upon every good and perfect thing that comes *down to us* from the Kingdom of Heaven. These are of a heavenly substance and transcend the boundaries of the experiences of the natural (unredeemed) humans. Truly the greatest gift was the Messiah Jesus himself. Who was made to be sin that we could become the righteous of God in Him.

All subsequent gifts are the result of acknowledging what his completed work on the cross has purchased for us. At the present time we live in the time of Grace. Grace is all that Jesus has supplied and will supply to us who believe.

We who attended church learned to pray and petition the Heavenly Father to perfect us and supply our needs. This “*Lord's prayer*” covers the most important things to pray: That our physical needs are met, that we have our sins forgiven, that we are not deceived or taken captive by the evil one, and that the Kingdom of God should come to restore the earth to its heavenly state of perfection again. Too few understand what they are really asking as they speak words without really thinking about them.

A prayer is also spoken when we ask the Lord and Savior for a new life. If spoken in faith, believing and understanding, your life can be restarted and restored as mine was over thirty years ago. The prayer connects you to your Heavenly Father who will shepherd you step by step into the life of God, with all of its promises and potential. It has little or nothing to do with connecting you to a 'church.' The modern church denominations that are so numerous tend to fall far short of the pattern for a Spiritual life. The true church is a heavenly one consisting of those who were *called out* of the darkness of this world into a life of liberty and hope. These believers make up the “Body

of Christ.” This is the true Spiritual church whose head and divine authority is Christ Jesus.

Christ's apostles speak about the God-transformed life of a 'new creation.'

This new creation experience allows believers to be recipients of a down payment (endowment) of the 'divine nature.' These heavenly things include that for which Jesus prayed in John 17. The new creature (or creation) is spoken of in 2 Corinthians 5:17. Strangely, while we become new creatures of the God kind, people who knew us, family members and friends don't seem to recognize this or comprehend it. For the most part, it remains hidden from their eyes.

My Story, Selected Chapters in My God Story

Until I was forty years of age, I was a faithful church goer. At various times I was a Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and a Congregational church member. There really was not much difference between them. I sang in choirs and even taught Sunday School. From the outside, I looked like any other member of the congregation. All the while, I was aware of a lack of the evidence of any sort of Spirituality in these church meetings. Services were routine and predictable. Attendance was also routine. I enjoyed the familiar and cozy traditions of church attendance. I liked well-performed music. Of course there were many friendly folks to chat with in mostly superficial, non spiritual conversations. But a living and active God was absent from my life in any real sense. I did not know Him. As every other *unregenerate* human being, my heart was desperately wicked, a sinner. My mind was unrenewed. I had no knowledge or faith in the Word of Truth. In God's eyes I was just another tare among any wheat that may have existed in such congregations. I did not actually believe that there was a spiritual component to be found in church life. I would have to seek elsewhere for that in *mysticism*.

Any Godly pursuit would have to be outside of a church house. I had a keen desire to know God from my earliest days. I was brought up with a curiosity about the supernatural that was fed by my dad's subscription to Fate magazine which were always to be found in our house. This magazine was about the New Age and Occultism. I sought the mysteries of God in college studying Theosophy, Astrology, and Eastern mysticism. I learned a good amount in these studies. I learned that anyone desiring to become an adept or guru had to perfect themselves through the rigors of self discipline.

Two or three years before I had my actual God encounter, I returned from a late night at the local piano bar where I sipped wine and sang in the company of good but worldly friends. Later that night, I had a powerful night vision. As the vision commenced I saw displayed before me a table and upon the table lay a huge, ancient book. The book appeared to be of great age such as one might see in a museum of antiquity or in a Harry Potter movie. I opened the book and slowly began to turn each yellowed page. Upon

each page there was inscribed many hand drawn symbols and mysterious inscriptions. glyphs, charms and symbols representing the deepest mysteries of God that I sought to know. Suddenly an amazing transformation occurred. As I turned the pages, the book morphed into the **Holy Bible**.

Then the dream changed again. I was no longer in the room with the book on the table. I was standing in a room alone. The room was full of light and I was facing that light. Then a voice spoke out of that light and said, "With this robe upon you, you will be a spokesman for God. You will know my thoughts and my ways." I don't know exactly how the robe was placed upon me, but I was just suddenly wearing it. At this moment, I felt my body being filled with tingling powerful energy.

Another scene followed and I was in the company of perhaps a dozen others. We were standing in a circle. While wearing the robe I began to act as a surrogate for Jesus. I felt the power of God and ministered at the direction of the Spirit. The power of God was moving and touching all. In this setting God was actively directing, teaching and discipling. God revealed that he could meet all of our needs when this level of unity was present.

When I awoke from this vision my body was still tingling, a sensation like electricity charging through my body from head to toe. Following this vision, I said to myself, "There is a God life and a world of Spiritual experiences calling me that I must one day pursue and when I do it will be all consuming. I will never be able to escape it or return to my ordinary life style again.

About this time, my first marriage had descended to ruin. I was quite aware that I was not a devoted and loving husband, or a good role model for my children. During growing marital stress, I felt growing depression and emotional despair. The marriage ended with dissolution and a final divorce. A powerful loneliness grew within me. I felt alone, unloved and desperately unhappy. During these years I studied to find out how I might reconcile with my wife to win and restore a loving relationship. I attempted counseling and group therapy. Yet, no methodology, counseling or worldly teachings could bring me peace of mind. I would drink regularly to medicate myself. I believe the Lord kept me from settling into another relationship. That would not have fixed me. It surely would have been another tragedy.

I reached the nadir of my depression at the end of Christmas vacation from the classroom. It was 1980. The night of the New Year of 1981, I was alone in an abyss when the New Year came in. I called out with tears and desperation for God to help me. If only He could prove he was real. If he could reveal himself to me and bring me out of the darkness and fearful torment I was living in.

I Call to God in Desperation

I was finally desperate enough to do serious business with God. My heart was broken (see Psalm 51) and I realized my hopeless and wretched condition. “God.. Lord.. help me! Deliver me from this torment and darkness! It was after this brief but heartfelt prayer that God answered me, making his presence known.

Within mere seconds of my calling out to God for mercy and relief, my racing mind became suddenly still. As the stillness settled into my soul. Words entered into my quieted mind. They dropped from somewhere outside myself and registered clearly as complete sentences in my mind. The words began, “*Fear not for I am with you..*” He also said that he was the Immanuel who would be with me. His words continued to come into my mind for a long time. Perhaps an hour or two. There was a dialogue. I would ask a question and God would answer. My mind was at peace and free from confusion from the former “tapes” of condemnation and self doubt. He spoke to me of His perfect love. His was a source of infinite love for humanity. The pain that people experience was all related to the absence of His kind of love. A growing thing flourishes with the proper nutriment; so does a soul flourish when God's love nurtures it and it becomes dark and damaged when it is absent. Love or lack of it, forms the soul's status. One can flourish with love and acceptance or wilt into darkness without it.

I felt the power of His love for me and my fear disappeared. The voice of God was not audible but spoke silently to my mind. It revealed his love and the power of that love to transform every hurt of humanity. There was no limit to this source of Love. It was like an endless flowing river. He spoke to me about matters of human fears and desperation that hinged upon the absence of love in a life. Peace came to me supernaturally along with the desire to know God more and more. He told me, “There is an Immanuel born to you, this day.” It was to be God *with me* working continually to know Him more and more.

After that night I wanted to share that amazing encounter. Where would I go? Who could I tell? I wanted to share the power and glory of his unlimited love. But who would I share it with? With students at school? No, class rooms are a dark, unwelcoming place. Was there a church where this kind of testimony could be shared? I didn't know of any church that would allow this. Who would understand that I just had an encounter with a Holy God? I didn't know where such God-touched believers could go to share a testimony of God touching their life. My ex- wife later shared that she was happy that I did not feel so desperate and unsettled for what ever reason.

My youngest sister Edie had experienced being “born again” around this time and began to encourage me. Someone told me there was an evangelist they had heard, who shared Spiritual truths, from the Bible, the kind that I had never been exposed to in my

denominational experience. I thought that sounded worth looking into. So I began to listen to that evangelist's teaching. His message essentially said that supernatural power and spiritual happenings is a reality! A promise of the miraculous is actually in the Bible! There was so much to study, so much to uncover in the Bible! The Bible, when examined seriously, has marvelous depth and revelation. This evangelist also taught that there was a Holy Spirit power from God to enable believers.

After this time, I began to read the Bible regularly. My mind tried to comprehend the Bible but I would fall asleep before I got very far. Beside this, I still wanted to go out with my old friends, drink and carry on with the familiar pleasures of the habitual night life. This pattern was a well engrained habit. But when I was home and not working I watched broadcasts of Christian evangelists and said the 'sinner's prayer' every chance I'd get.

A Taste of True Worship

A major evangelistic conference came to Minneapolis that May. It was the Kenneth Copeland Ministry. This was the first time I witnessed the power of Christian worship. The city auditorium was filled to capacity. I entered the building going up the outer ramp to the second floor. As I ascended the ramp that led to the upper levels, I heard a huge volume of sound coming from the auditorium. I could literally feel the the presence of God in a tangible way. It permeated the air as a measurable weight. I had never experienced such amazing worship. It was entirely fervent and authentic, the likes of which I had never seen, heard or experienced in a church. People seemed to be swept up in a true passion for worship. Their hands were uplifted they seemed oblivious of anything else but God. Although I was thrilled with the experience. At some point in the evangelists message I still wanted to exit the meeting early to have *fellowship* with my piano bar friends. That very important mile stone event did not actually change me to any great degree. My heart was still entangled with habits and thought patters from my old life style.

Holy Spirit Baptism

In July of that year, I was doing maintenance on property I owned in rural North Dakota. I had been invited to sing in an Assembly of God church in a near by town that Sunday. This pastor had come to *visit* my sister Mary in town. This Spirit filled pastor had a reputation of knowing who and what was on God's mind. I believe it was a Friday afternoon preceding my scheduled Sunday. She lived next door to me so I was invited over. The pastor explained to my sister, her husband, and I about the baptism of the Holy Ghost. I had no theological objections about the matter and wanted to go deeper with God. The pastor shared Bible verses to validate the practice. Finally, we gathered for prayer that included "laying on of hands." This was for the purpose of imparting the

Holy Spirit Baptism. I was self conscious and nervous when I was asked to release sounds that expressed words outside of my own vocabulary. I was perplexed. How could I say something without knowing what I was saying! The utterance was to be released out of my Spirit. I said to the group, "I would go home and do it in privacy." I did just that. That night I had a deep and life changing experience.

Later, that same night about 3 in the morning a friend came over drunk and demonized. God must have directed him to visit me. I wanted him to know what I had experienced. I knew at that moment the reality of the Living God. I was still very ignorant about everything. I didn't know what words to say to lead him into the prayer of salvation even though he was ready at that moment. He was led and open to the Bible and to God right then. I believe that was a seed-event in his life nonetheless.

The morning came. I may have slept only a few hours. When I awoke, I was keenly aware that I was experiencing something totally new. I felt exhilarated, altogether different, walking in the light of joy and peace. I was experiencing the new creation. It is hard to describe this feeling. I felt lighter than air. The sky was bluer, the world was more beautiful. The whole world was new. In the days following, the Bible became my dearest possession an asset I was never without. From Genesis the Revelation, It provided continuous revelation of the most amazing kind.

Sunday morning arrived that I had been asked to sing. Throughout the entire morning, I was in the grip of a compelling Spiritual force that possessed my thoughts. It was a force beyond myself. My thoughts became fixated upon one phrase, "Of all the sinners in the world, I am the chief!" For these hours I was inside a kind of spiritual 'vacuum jar.' To explain, It felt my mind to be sealed so that no other thought could enter. When the time came for me to come forward to sing my special I was compelled to deliver those exact words before the assembled congregation. It did not matter what anybody might think or say. The words came out slowly as one delivering in birth. "*Of all the sinners in the world I am the chief.*" After that moment there was an out-pouring of "*the anointing*" that grasped me. It gripped me in the song I sang and after that hour it led all my thoughts and studies.

The anointing is that which indicates God is *using* a person, *empowering* his words or actions. It is the Holy Spirit guiding a believer that was and is God's plan for building the church from its beginning. I did not learn the term "*anointing*" until several months later. The anointing is a rare commodity to find in a church service these days. In modern congregations, academic forms and human programs have replaced it. In studies of the Word, the anointing of revelation supplies understanding. The *Rhema* of God (the Word spoken to one personally) attended the Scriptures as I studied. (As scripture tells us, "Man does not live by bread only but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.")

That fall, eight months after my first encounter with the Lord, I returned to my teaching job. God was first in my priorities. In the evening I smoked my pipe and sipped wine or cocktails while I studied the word. I listened to my slate of radio evangelists who were anointed, true Word teachers. After a while my supply of tobacco ran out. I never bought more. When the liquor ran out I never replaced it. There was no need for it. The habits of many years dried up and disappeared. I stopped watching television and drew closer to the Lord each day. Television and so-called entertainment was a vexation of the spirit and news of the days had no relevance to me. The world of the flesh and the thoughts that possessed the world around me were meaningless and empty. I was becoming *“crucified to the world.”* Galatians 6:14” I lived alone then and studied the Bible until I fell asleep. Even the sweet music of earlier years rang hollow. Sentimental ballads even seemed remote and empty.

I had no trouble discerning the ministers who carried the “Spirit of Life” from those who spoke merely religious words. After my 3 hours of radio teaching I would read the Bible into the night. God's presence grew more vivid each day. The intimacy that I felt in the presence of the Lord was a reality. His presence grew stronger and stronger each day. As I said, I had abandoned TV for it was a vexation to my spirit. I was vexed by what was called entertainment. Interest in any kind of sports was the same, it was mere humdrum and noise. Current events and daily news reports were of no consequence anymore. The nice and wholesome music that I grew up enjoying spoke of only vanity and worldliness. I was growing as a disciple of the Lord. During this chapter of my God story, my one passion was being with God and I basked in the comforting warmth of His presence

The Spirit of Truth

At that time I began to experience an aspect of the Holy Spirit that Jesus called the “Spirit of Truth.” The Spirit of Truth is more than an intellectual appraisal of things we see and hear. I will try to explain it this way: I felt that I had been placed in mental and spiritual state where Jesus' heavenly perspective was imprinted upon everything I saw, heard, or read. The world's words and actions had to pass through the filter of God's discerning Spirit. The phenomena of being “Crucified to the World” (Galatians 6:14) also became a reality to me. We have read the words of Paul but much too superficially. It is not a mere phrase, it is a state of being, a state of consciousness. The Spirit of Truth that the world does not, and cannot receive. (John 14:17)

To clarify more about the Spirit of Truth, I can only explain that this was more than a mental appraisal. It felt like I had become hard-wired with a mechanism that immediately registers the things of this world, human nature and matters that belong to God. It is a feature of the redeemed life that accompanies the New Man, the “new creation.” However this might operate, I knew the things that were of God from things

tainted by the darkness of this world and human vanity.

As I listened to religious music, choirs singing hymns, even contemporary Christian music, I found for the most part, it jangled my spirit. What I found in contemporary Christian music is the artist in some way is trying to draw attention to him or herself. It is this personal 'style' that is *valued by the world*. The world looks for uniqueness that sets the performer's brand apart and that makes it marketable. Anointed music does not attempt to draw attention to the performer. The passion comes from God, not an affectation of performance. Many forms of Christian music have a veneer of religiosity but are without anointing. "Soul music" is any kind of musical performance that is so imbued with the performer's ego and affectations that it loses its core message and Spiritual power. The great hymns of yester-year were anointed as the words and song were penned. It is only in their modern performance that the depth of meaning is lost.

The Spirit of Truth was evident in the domain of work, classroom and school activities and the time I spent with my children. Public programs and professional meetings *registered* as empty, dead noise, and vanity. Wherever I went I felt less like a participant in anything but an alien observing from another place, as though I was looking at a display through a window pane. Religious music was intolerable, even pleasant old songs from years back echoed of shallow sentimentalism.

These first 3 years are what I call my "*back of the desert*" years. My back of the desert was a low rent, efficiency apartment in inner city Minneapolis. One thing that formed a profound, lasting perception during those early years was discovering the darkness and spiritual emptiness of churches. If I visited any church, especially the old, main line denominations, the Spirit of Truth revealed whether there was life or death there. If the Spirit of God was absent I would experience a powerful witness; a pawl of deadness, a deadly emptiness prevailed. This sense was clear but it could not be the result of intellect or reason. My spirit literally was grieved by the absence of God. I wondered how long souls attended this church without knowing that God's life was entirely absent? How long had these people invested time and energy in a place that had no connection to the kingdom of God?

It was this experience that has shaped my spiritual life ever since that time. God is grieved with churches filled with people who do not nor can not experience Him in their so-called worship services. My writing "The Gospel Without Religion" is my answer to try to encourage people to be the True Church, the church without walls, the "Called Out Body." Human beings can and must experience Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Discerning Life or Death in Religion

I was soon to notice that emotional hype and gimmicks were widely employed by

religious leaders and prominent ministries. This garners the attention of a congregation, keeps them entertained or helps to induce more generous giving. I listened to countless sermons and teachings and conference speakers. Eventually one hears nearly every possible theme which can be preached or taught. With most every ministry an underlying subtext was to promote their ministry and the root paradigm of institutional religion.

Discipleship for all practical purposes is a foreign concept to most congregations. It is more than a mini course or a pamphlet on the subject. True discipleship must return the believer to the church's apostolic roots, where all believers are engaged in doing the work of God. It is more than promoting the institution and submitting to its leaders.

Having these fresh insights and motivations, I began writing a book which might have been called *The Gospel for Dummies*, but I did not want to present another religious book title in the market of Christian Books. So I decided upon this title, "The Gospel Without Religion". The purpose of the writing would be to show people who, like myself, were hungry to know God more but were sidetracked into religion. It was written to enable religious people to discover God's reality outside the context of the religious paradigm. I hoped to reiterate the simplicity of the God life, the way the apostles described it; no more, no less.

About a year after the anniversary of my first God encounter, in my one room back of the desert, ghetto apartment, I was blessed to hear the audible voice of God on one occasion in a night vision. I always ask others to describe their own experience of hearing the audible voice. Here is my own description; It is a reverberating, many layered voice, laden with love and power. As I listened the voice addressed the message of Ephesians 4 relative to the gifts given to the build the Body to mature us all into the form of one perfect man:

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head. “

The years following were punctuated with many special times. These could be called adventures in the Spirit. I am cautioned not to sound self-exalted in sharing these. Being led by the Spirit in worship; Having visions of future events; Traveling in dreams to minister in far away places; Being met and ministered to by angels. I have seen many of the things described in the book of Acts. As amazing as this may sound, let me share

that I have also suffered extreme pangs, weakness, testing, and illness as well. Some teach that God's children should never have such afflictions to bare but I believe this is the norm now and was also in the times of the apostles. There are many Spirit ordered ministries as we see in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and 14 and Romans chapter 12. The works of Christ are indeed things which should attend the believer today. These however, are initiated by the leading of God's will and direction and not by our own will.

You can start your testimony today: *“Jesus, I believe that you died to pay the penalty for my sins, Lord Jesus forgive me of my sins; I receive your promise of Eternal Life; I want to be a child of the Highest. Make me brand new!”*