

## Day One: More Than a Church Member

Author: Brent Colley

---

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

I was reared in a home with a great Godly grandmother. My life seemed to rotate around church. From an early age, I was a contributor to all areas of ministry at Fairview Holy Church of Christ. I loved to sing and be a part of everything that happened in God's house. This lifestyle allowed me to become a chameleon inside the church. I was not saved, but I appeared to be. I even convinced myself through comparison that I was a Christian. I compared myself to alcoholic uncles, devil worshiping cousins and a host of other people who didn't glorify God. I thought I was a Christian because I was convinced that I was "better" than all these other people.

Obviously, I was comparing myself to the wrong people. In the light of family and friends, perhaps I was a stellar church member, but in the light of Jesus and the Scriptures, I was a filthy sinner with a great need.

Fast forward a of couple years to Monday morning of Summer revival. I was "going with" a young lady and wanted to sit by her for the service. Her mother said I could but insisted that her daughter and I sit by her on the second pew. I am so thankful that she made me move up to the front. It was there that I heard, for the first time, that I was a sinner and without salvation was lost and doomed for Hell. It was made very clear to me that morning, by the Holy Spirit, that I needed to be saved. Praise God; He reached down to a 12 year old church member and made me a part of His family.

## Day Two: My Story

Author: Margaret Traglia

---

I have been a Christian for over 55 years now and HE'S STILL working on me to make me what ought to be! I walked the isle of a little Methodist Church on the southwest side of Huntsville, AL, when I was 4 or 5 years old. The preacher preached on forgiveness during our revival; and I realized I had a great need for forgiveness even at a young age. Jesus saved my soul and He began a good work in me.

He's the author of my salvation and the finisher of my faith. He gave me a love for His Word and I've been studying His Word in depth for 25 years through the community Bible study. My calling is to teach the younger women to love their husbands, love their children, be chaste, and be a homemaker!

Titus 2 - I belong to JESUS.

## Day Three: My Story

Author: Janice Wittscheck

---

My story of my true conversion is a miracle. Of course, it is a miracle when any person gets saved. It is a wonder that I survived the life I lived, but God had a plan for me. As I think of everything, I am tearful,

remembering all the wrongs and failures in my life. But, that was before Christ entered my life and dramatically changed me. So, I will try and tell "my" story with as few words as possible.

I grew up in a Christian home. We went to church all the time. If there was a revival, we were there every night. As children, we always knew that on Sunday and Wednesday we would be in church. Even when we wanted to stay home and watch a Disney special, it was not allowed. If we felt bad, we went to church. You only stayed home if you had a fever, vomiting, or the "D" word. I think you know what I am talking about. What I guess I am trying to say is that my parents modeled the Christian life to me and my siblings.

My father was in the Navy, and we moved every three years. Every time there was a different home, the search was on to find a Bible-believing church. After finding that church, Mother would fix a great meal and invite the pastor over to the house to eat after a Sunday sermon. My parents would become involved in teaching Sunday School and serving in any way that they could.

My father was transferred to Naples, Italy. We lived there for two and one-half years. We could not find a church there, but that was not a problem. My dad and some of his Christian coworkers started a church in an apartment. I remember going to the church. I was about seven years of age. I guess at some point I must have gone forward to "ask Jesus into my heart". Obviously, every child wants to go to Heaven, and I am sure that I had those feelings. I just don't remember it. Since I asked Jesus into my heart, which I don't remember, I felt through the years that I was a Christian. At this church, I was baptized in a bathtub. I have seen pictures, but I really don't remember much about going forward. Those pictures and the life my parents lived made me feel as if I were a Christian. I really thought I was.

I married my high school sweetheart. I thought he was the man of my dreams. We had two children, and we were raising our family in church. I was sure I had a Christian home. I was so proud, but my life fell apart. The man of my dreams had a dark side that I did not know about. I tried to forgive him and live with him for the sake of the children, but he continued to be unfaithful. I finally had enough and told him I could not live that way. He left me and our two children, ages 2 and 3. He had met an 18 year old and felt that she was the one for him. This was the darkest time in my life.

This was a test of me and I failed it miserably. You see, I only had head knowledge of Christ. He didn't live in my heart. I had learned to walk and talk like a Christian, but when my faith was tested, I turned from God. Due to the events in my life, I felt something was wrong with me. I set out to prove that there was nothing wrong with me. I neglected my children, something that I regret to this day. It was all about me and trying to make myself better. I traveled down a dark path and did a lot of things that were awful.

Every Monday morning my mom would call. It was a dreaded call, because I knew that she was going to ask the question, "Did you go to church yesterday?" I always cringed when she would call on Monday. If I was able to avoid her, she would catch me on Tuesday and ask the question.

If I had been a Christian, I would have stayed faithful in church. I would have had the support of Christian friends. God would have seen me through, but head knowledge is not enough. You have to have God in your heart to make it through the tough times. Those times are to help you grow.

Bryan and I met on a blind date. He was raised with a Lutheran background. We never really talked about God much. Our background religious experiences were not important to us. We married after dating for a year. We didn't go to church for a while. God was not a priority for us. We would visit different churches occasionally. My father had started to pastor a church, so we would go and hear him preach. My sister was inviting me to go to her church, and I know that my parents were praying for me. The boys and I finally started going to church with her. Bryan would not go, but we remained faithful to church. The boys would ask why Bryan didn't go. I really couldn't answer them. I still was going on the fact that I had obviously been saved as a child, baptized and was a Christian despite the life that I had lived. It was still all head knowledge.

One day at church my heart was convicted. I can't remember the sermon, but I know that God was dealing with me. I had never repented of the life that I had lived. I went forward. I remember crying out to God and asking Him to forgive me of my sins. All the time I thought I was rededicating my life to Christ, but something was different. I had a hunger for the things of God that I had not had before. I was studying His Word and learning the books of the Bible. It was all fresh and new. It did not occur to me until years later that my true salvation date was when I turned from my world to God and began to have a hunger for Him. Not only did I want to learn of Him, but I had Him in my heart and wanted to live for Him. I had truly become a Christian.

Satan made me feel confused for years because I was not sure of my salvation date. Every time a preacher asked about a specific time, I would not know when I was truly saved. I decided one day that I needed to nail this down because it would bother me until it was settled. So, I got my baptism in order. That day was a glorious day because all of my doubts were gone. I have had a peace ever since. I know I have been saved. I know where my eternity will be. I have never doubted my salvation again. Praise God!

## Day Four: Created and Bought Back

Author: Jason Moore

---

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1a)

Dale Galloway relates a story. "The boy who held his little boat and said, 'It's mine, I made it,' suffered a keen disappointment. One day, with exuberant anticipation, he carried his little boat to the shore of a lake and sailed it on the clear, blue water. Suddenly a gust of wind unraveled the string he was holding and his boat began to sail away. Eventually it vanished from sight. Sadly the boy made his way home - without his prized possession. It was lost."

"Some months later as the boy passed the toy shop something caught his eye. Could it be? He looked closer. Yes! There was his little boat. Overjoyed, the boy went inside and explained the story to the shop owner. 'I'm sorry,' said the shopkeeper, 'but it's my boat now. If you want it, you'll have to pay the price for it.' Sad at heart, the boy left the store. But he was determined to get his boat back, even though it meant working and saving until he had enough money to pay for it."

"At last the day came. Clutching the money, he walked into the shop and said he was there to buy his boat back. Once the shopkeeper saw the right amount was being paid, he reached into the showcase and retrieved the boat handing it to the boy. The lad's face lit up with a smile of satisfaction as he held the little boat in his arms. 'You're mine,' he said, 'twice mine. Mine because I made you, and now, mine because I bought you.'"

Do you realize just how much God loves you? He created you, and when you were lost, He paid the price to buy you back. He has proven His love once and for all. Isn't it time you fully embrace it?

## Day Five: My Story

Author: Pamela Storz

---

I am the daughter of foreign missionaries, so it's not surprising, even at my advanced age, to find myself a *missionary* for a recovery program. You might say it's in my DNA - being a missionary or an advocate of a cause. Thankfully, mom and dad did not shelter us from the culturally-rich yet poverty-stricken world around us. Instead, we immediately became part of our environment. Growing up in a third world country opened my eyes at a very young age to much of the world's insanity and unfairness. I have always been a champion for the abused, poor, unstable, neglected or forgotten, physically and mentally challenged, and addicted. I could summon up a heart wrenching performance in their defense on command.

Sadly, my compassionate heart made me an easy target, and I learned very quickly the right words to say to those who were hurting. I knew the words to say, I just didn't allow myself to feel the words. I knew how to comfort others; I just didn't know how to allow God to heal me! Even as recent as 5 years ago, I wouldn't dare show my face in a group of fine, God-honoring, Jesus-filled folks like you. I was ugly. I was broken. I was hurt. I was alone. Mostly, I was ashamed. I was humiliated at how my sickly heart sized-up when compared to the wholehearted love of the Lord. I won't go into detail about the nature of my illness, because it's inappropriate in this serene and spiritual setting. But suffice it to say, I knew in my heart I was not worthy of Godly company. I had become one of the people or causes I championed, and I didn't like me at all.

Then my sister, Charlotte, died and I hit bottom.

I returned to Ft. Myers, Florida, after the funeral and promptly tried to drown my hurt the best way I knew. Several months later, when I finally crawled out of the hole of self-pity and self-hatred I had dug for myself, I took a hard look at my surroundings. I cannot lie, I wanted to die.

It was at that point, I realized, that my relationship with the Father had been severed. I've always felt that suicide was the most selfish and most sinful act against God a person could commit. To even have that thought, to even entertain the possibility was actually, in itself, my moment of clarity that my life was nothing without Him. I was nothing without Him. The reason I felt like a big Nothing, was because I was without Him.

Praise God. Praise you, Jesus, thank you for stepping in and calling my name.

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit

himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:26, 27)

I swallowed my pride, and called on my own personal missionaries; Mom and Dad. The nature of my illness was such that I couldn't comprehend the depth of their pain in losing Charlotte. I only knew I needed help. I still struggle with the extent of my self-absorption that was enabled by addiction...I am so ashamed at my selfishness...inside, though, I knew the alternative was no longer an option. I needed to live, if only long enough to make amends for my unfortunate and sad choices. I kept repeating like a mantra, "Just let me live long enough to really know you Father, to please you, to love you, and honor you Jehovah."

I would like to tell you that it was all sunshine, peace, rainbows, and happiness (excuse me, my hippy tendencies run deep) since that moment of clarity five years ago in that dilapidated trailer in Florida, but it was a daily battle. I began attending church every time the doors were open, and did not rest until I had a quiet time with the Father each day. But something was missing...I wasn't feeling it. It's hard to explain, really...surprising since words are my money-makers...I can't quite describe how I was going through all the motions, making the lifestyle changes, but something was missing. Now, I know physically and mentally I was changing, but my heart was still broken.

One day I was working high-end retail in the Men's department when I noticed a gentleman walking through my department. I'd seen this man before and was always struck by his joyful, peaceful countenance...quite different from what I was accustomed to, I assure you. We struck up a conversation - okay, I flirted? And he invited me to something called Celebrate Recovery. I felt safe accepting, thinking, (a) it's in a Baptist church, and (b) with a name like Celebrate Recovery, probably no one is going to tempt me with anything harmful, mind-altering, or illegal, and (c) would be a nice Christian gathering on an otherwise *most-hated-by-single-women-worldwide* holiday: Valentine's Day.

Yes, Valentine's Day 2008. I know, how cliché, right?

I almost backed out, but my mom gently encouraged me. So, against my self-doubt, I went. I will never be the same again.

People that have known me for only a very short period of time see the dramatic and complete change of heart. My heart is whole, and full of the Lord.

Let me tell you a little about Celebrate Recovery so you'll understand how the drama occurred! I believe God placed me in this program because He knew it would speak to me. God gave me this precious gift of recovery because I am precious to Him.

The Celebrate Recovery program was designed by pastors Rick Warren and Jon Walker of Saddleback Church in California, to assist Pastor Walker with his alcohol recovery program - not a program he was teaching...a program he needed for himself...for alcohol addiction.

I point this out because it's important to realize that no matter your walk in life, your position in the church, we are all flawed individuals and easy targets for the enemy. Look at me! A missionary kid! With intimate knowledge

of God's promises, yet, just now at middle age, discovering His awesome power and love!

The evening of February 14, 2008, I attended my first Celebrate Recovery meeting. Of course, I was terribly interested in this handsome man who had invited me! We met in the Youth Department of the church, and the environment was cozy and welcoming. We sat on couches and easy chairs all arranged around a center stage and monitors. We sang several worship songs, and then heard a testimony. After a closing prayer, we all separated into different groups and genders...I was a little disappointed that I wasn't going to attend a small group with this new good-looking guy...I've since learned the absolute necessity of keeping the genders separate...but I went along with the plan.

There was a group for Alcohol and Drug Addiction, a group for Abuse, and finally the group for Life Struggles, which I chose thinking, "it will help me to be able to talk about Charlotte." The group leader opened with prayer, and then we introduced ourselves. Fortunately, I was near the end of the circle...I listened to everyone else, so that I would know what to say.

I practiced mentally before my turn: "My name is Pamela, and I am a believer in Jesus, and I came because this really handsome man asked me, and I didn't want to be alone on Valentine's Day..." No. That wouldn't work. Clearly, I had boy-crazy problems; anyone would be able to see that. My turn came.

"My name is Pamela, and I am a Christian. I came to Celebrate Recovery because I'm struggling with issues of...um...well..."

I stuttered. My throat clogged. My eyes filled. Probably for the first time in my life, I was speechless. There were so many reasons I needed help; I couldn't even name one. I really did want recovery. I just didn't know where to begin.

I took a deep breath. Someone passed me a Kleenex, although, I'm SURE I had waterproof mascara on. Was I racooning?! Nose dripping?

"My name is Pamela, and I am a grateful follower of Jesus; and, well, I don't even know where to begin, but I want recovery."

Everyone nodded and said, "We're so glad you're here, Pam," and then went on to the next person. I didn't even mind that they'd shortened my name. I was so blessed they didn't judge.

That has been the recurrent level of acceptance and love I have received in this program...I was encouraged to begin a step study and immediately began to experience real change. I'm serious! Look at the very first lesson: Denial. Realize that I'm not God. I admit that I am **powerless** to control my tendency to do the **wrong** thing, and that my life is **unmanageable**. Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor (Matthew 5:3).

You know what? I believe God had me in mind when He helped Pastor Warren design this program. God has seen me this whole time. He has felt sorrow for me! He has felt loneliness for me! He has longed for my presence when I hid from everyone!

He is El Roi, the God who Sees! Everything. He had me specifically in mind. Oh how He loves me! Oh how he has recovered me! He is Jehovah Rapha', The God Who Heals Me.

The rest of the story...I am now a leader of a women's group for drug and alcohol addiction at Celebrate Recovery. And yes, I married that tall, dark, and handsome man who invited me to Celebrate Recovery. You know why? Because he is part of God's blessing. The thought stops me in my tracks. He. Sees. Everything. There isn't anything about this recovery that hasn't been anointed by the Father.

I'd like to close with Romans 8:38 and 39: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present or the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God bless you and recover you. Thank you for letting me share.