

Jesus Won't Forgive Me For The Things That I Have Done!

(The Testimony of Raymond Peter DeFabritis)

Dedicated to my lovely, sweet dearest wife, Sheila, who put up with me and loved me both before and after my conversion. I am convinced that because of her heart-felt cries out to God to save our marriage, God began to move on her behalf by presenting both natural and supernatural circumstances in my life for the purpose of leading me to repentance.

Preface

I was saved in the workplace at the age of 29. Through the efforts of one man (lay person at the time) who witnessed to me daily for six months, I eventually reached the point where I gave my own alter call and asked Jesus to forgive me right within this man's office.

One might ask, "You mean you didn't get saved in a church?" Why would a rotten sinner, such as I was, want to go to church? I was foul, wicked and hateful. Being around Christians and talking about Jesus was the last thing I wanted to do.

Although this man that witnessed to me was a young Christian at the time, he still had areas of his life that were not Christ-like yet; such as chain-smoking and heavy drinking amongst other things.

Although I might have intuitively known that these behaviors were not expected in a Christian's life, I was in no position to make any sort of a (righteous) judgment; mainly because I was quite aware of all the shortcomings (wickedness) in my own life. I only knew one thing; **no one else** was talking to me about Jesus or sharing the scriptures with me. It was the daily references to holy scripture, praising and worshiping Jesus and the singing of songs of praise, that kept me showing up to hear more.

Jesus speaking with Nicodemus, said “...***Except a man be born again, he cannot see (understand) the kingdom of God***”, let alone enter into it. (***John 3:3-5***)

Indeed, prior to my conversion (being born again), I was blind. Blind to the things of God and His kingdom. But, bless God, this I do know, He has given me **new eyes**, a **new heart** and a **new life**.

So as one reads about the events that led up to my conversion, let it be known that it is being told from the perspective of hindsight. In other words, I am able to describe those events as someone who is now able to see clearly as to what was actually going on. Of course at the time the events were happening, I was not aware of any of the behind-the-scene spiritual activities that were taking place, both good and evil.

As a matter of fact, after my conversion, I was able to see the dark past periods of my life as if I were watching a movie.

If one is honest and reflective enough with themselves, perhaps they will acknowledge that from their childhood, God was there, reaching out to them, trying to get their attention.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. (John 1:6-9)

God will not force you to love Him for there would be no virtue in that. However, He wills and does try to influence every person to come unto Him; drawing them into His bosom. Nevertheless, it must be our own free-will choice to accept or reject His affectionate invitations.

N.B. All scriptural references are from the King James Bible.

Early Childhood

Now someone having a name like DeFabritis (which is an Italian name), and having been born in Mount Vernon, NY and raised in the Bronx, New York City; there's a high probability that that person would be born into a Roman Catholic family, of which I was.

While in grade school all those that were Catholic (which was the majority of the class) would have early-release-time on Tuesday afternoons so that we could walk down to the church of the Nativity for Catechism class.

This class was taught by Nuns. There were the sweet nuns, like Sister Mary Margaret; and then there were the not-so-sweet and strict nuns, like Sister Ricarda (not sure of the spelling).

Sister Ricarda was the one who would whack our rear ends with a wooden ruler to make sure we would be kneeling with our backs straight up (no slouching). Similarly, she would whack our knuckles if we were caught talking out of place or not paying attention or chewing gum, etc.

Now it was the job of the sisters to prepare us for our first Holy Communion. This included learning all the right moves that were to take place during a Mass, such as, when to genuflect, when to stand, when to kneel, and when to sit. They also taught us what to say and how to respond during various parts of the Mass and while in the Confessional booth.

Moreover, they also taught us all the necessary fundamental prayers, such as the Hail Mary, the Our Father (the Lord's prayer), the Glory be to the Father, the Apostle's Creed, the Act of Contrition, etc.

Once we received our First Communion, then we entered into Confirmation classes (to learn to be soldiers for Christ) which were taught to us by the Marist brothers. These men lived and taught at the local high school (Mount Saint Michael Academy in the Bronx) from which I graduated in 1965. At confirmation, the Bishop would come to our local parish and lay hands on us to receive the Holy Ghost as part of the ceremony. Also, the recipient was allowed to choose a confirmation name that was to be selected after the names of one of the Saints. I chose Christopher. My reasoning at the time was twofold; one because it included the name 'Christ' which I liked. Secondly, Saint Christopher was the patron saint for safe travel. This seemed important to me (even though I was only 12 years old) since there were at least two car-related accidents that I knew of in our family.

Amongst other things, the brothers taught us how to perform the Stations of the Cross, the differences between venial and mortal sins, the significance of attending Mass on the first Friday of the month, and how to participate in novenas. But the thing I remember the most was how they taught us about the lives of the saints (the ones that were canonized by the Roman Catholic Church) and how they both lived for God and were used by God. I recall how I would sit on the edge of my seat absorbing every

word they were saying, especially when they talked about the miracles that were recorded through the saints of God.

Although my parents were professing Catholics and insisted that I participate in all the facets of the religion, they never attended Mass with me on a regular basis, except for special occasions, such as baptisms, first communions, confirmations, weddings, etc.

As a child I believed everything I was told and most of what I saw. Why wouldn't I? I had no reason not to believe. This is the nature of a child!

For example, at the age of about 8 or 9 years old, I would come home from Sunday Mass (I usually attended the 8:00 am Mass), and turn on the TV while sitting on the living room floor and watched Oral Roberts as he conducted his tent-meeting healing services.

Now a typical Sunday morning would include my father going out for the Sunday newspaper and buying freshly baked pastries and/or bagels. I would usually be home by 8:50 am (you could set your watch as to what time you would be finished with Mass) just in time to enjoy the food. Moreover, it was not unusual to have one or two of the neighbors at the house, and maybe one of my uncles, who would join us for this Sunday morning gathering.

As everyone was gathered in the dinette, I would be in the living room sitting on the floor about three feet from the TV watching Oral Roberts.

I became mesmerized as I watched person after person getting healed of their physical infirmities as Oral Roberts laid his hand upon them and prayed for healing.

On one particular day as I was watching these most amazing events, I turned around and shouted into the dining room towards my parents, and said: “Hey, why don’t we take Aunt Lena to one of this man’s meetings?” You see, my Aunt Lena (not by blood, but by respect) was severely stricken with rheumatoid arthritis that affected her whole body. As a matter of fact, at one point in her life she was so badly deformed by this disease that the Arthritis Foundation chose her to be their poster person.

Well after I had said this to my parents, my mother responded and said that Oral Roberts was one of those ‘faith healers’. Then I responded and said, “What’s wrong with that?” And then continuing, I said, “Why don’t they do this in our church?” I didn’t get an answer to that question, and we never did take Aunt Lena to an Oral Roberts service, or any other service for that matter.

Unbeknownst to me, this was the beginning of my desire to see the power of God manifested in my life and in this world; albeit, this desire would lay dormant for more than two decades.

Confession and Penance

As a young child (somewhere between 8 and 10 years old), I was very sensitive to the things of God and to what I had been taught by the Sisters and Brothers.

In preparation for Sunday Mass and to be able to participate in Holy Communion, the routine would be for one to go to confession on Saturday afternoon. After one's sins were heard and confessed, and having said the Act of Contrition prayer, then absolution would be granted; and the priest would assign a certain number of prayers that were to be said as penance. A typical penance for a 10 year old would be something like 3 to 5 Hail Mary's and an Our Father or two. This penance was to be said prior to receiving Holy Communion on Sunday and was typically done immediately after leaving the confessional booth. I would go down to the altar (unpadded marble floor) kneeling straight up (as Sister Ricarda instructed us), to say my prayers of penance.

On one occasion, I went to confession, and being the naughty little boy that I was, to my dismay, I was assigned a penance of the whole Rosary.

To the best of my recollection: the Rosary is constructed of five decades of beads; and upon each bead a Hail Mary prayer was to be said. Each decade of beads was separated by a single bead upon which the Our Father and Glory Be to the Father prayers would be said. The five decades of beads were connected by a medallion having a

figure of the Virgin Mary, upon which the Hail Holy Queen prayer would be said.

Stemming from the medallion of Mary was a chain with a single bead (Glory Be to the Father prayer), then three beads together for three Hail Mary's, then another single bead (the Our Father prayer), and finally the Crucifix upon which the Apostle's Creed prayer was to be said.

Starting at the Crucifix, I began to say my assigned penance prayers. Not being prepared for such an unusual amount of penance, I did not have my Rosary with me. Nevertheless, I proceeded. I had no problem with the Apostle's Creed, nor the Glory Be to the Father prayer, nor the Lord's prayer or the Hail Mary prayers. However, I never learned the Hail Holy Queen prayer. So when I got to the medallion of the Virgin Mary I said three Our Father's hoping that would be acceptable by God as a substitute for my lack of knowledge.

Now as I entered the five decades of Hail Mary prayers, I started to keep track on my fingers. After saying about thirty or so Hail Mary's, I began to be overcome with monotony and boredom, and as a result I actually lost count of which decade I was on. So as not to be displeasing to God, and having a fear of God, I started over again!

The Family Bible

At Easter time in the Spring just before I was about to turn 12 years of age (the year of my

Confirmation), I decided to buy a family Bible since we did not have a Bible in our home. So I went to Woolworth's five & dime store on Fourth Avenue in Mount Vernon, NY and informed the young lady behind the counter that I wanted to purchase a family Bible.

She sold me a beautiful four-inch thick black-covered Bible, and on the following Sunday after Mass I brought it to my local Parish Priest for the purpose of having him bless it. (In those days, just about every major item that was purchased would always be presented to the Priest for his blessing; such items as new cars, homes, bicycles, jewelry, pets, etc.)

When I brought the Bible to my Priest, he looked at the first page just inside the cover and informed me that I had bought the wrong Bible. (I assumed that it was not a [or the] Catholic version of the Bible. Perhaps noticing the disappointment on my face, he reluctantly went ahead and blessed it anyway. But the damage had been done; I was crushed. I didn't even know that there were any different versions of the Bible.

I didn't know exactly what to do, but for whatever reason (perhaps because I had already filled out all the family dedication information on the first few pages), I decided to keep it anyway and I presented it to my family on Easter Sunday. (Till this day I still have no idea what Bible version it was.) My parents were always grateful for any act of kindness on my part, but it soon became obvious that having

the Bible in our home was met with an attitude of indifference.

As for myself, I decided to start reading it. Of course, as with any other book, I started from the beginning in the book of Genesis. Without having much knowledge and/or guidance; after reading about fifty pages or so, I began to get bored and quickly lost interest. Then that was the beginning of the end for that Bible. (Most of the instructions I received while in the Catholic Church were about the Catechism, the Mass, the Stations of the Cross, Novenas, the Festive Holidays, the Saint's Days, etc. Personal Bible study was not emphasized.) As for our family Bible: well for a while it laid on top of the coffee table in the living room, and eventually was relegated to the inside of a credenza. Since leaving home in 1968, I only saw it one more time.

High School Days

I attended Public School through the 8th grade. Kindergarten through the 6th grade was at PS (Public School) 68 on Monticello Avenue in the Bronx. At the first year of its opening, I attended John Philip Sousa Junior High School (PS 142) on Baychester Avenue, also in the Bronx.

Although the Junior High classes included the 7th, 8th and 9th years, I was only there for the 7th and 8th grades. This is because I knew that after the 9th grade, I would be finishing out my High School days at Evander Childs Senior High School on Gun Hill Road in the Bronx.

It was at that school where there were incidents of a student being shot at a football game and a teacher being stabbed in the classroom. This frightened me to death.

I was a slightly above average student and took learning seriously. However, I could not envision being able to learn properly in an environment such as what was occurring at Evander Childs. I had had enough problems of being physically harassed (bullied) at the Junior High School. So at the end of my 8th grade year, I literally begged my parents to please send me to a private school for my high school years. (This was significant since it meant that my parents would now have to pay for my education as opposed to the tax-payer funded public school.) My father was a laborer at Lawler's automatic water-valve factory in Mount Vernon, and my mother was executive secretary to Mr. Gaynor at Gaynor News, a newspaper/magazine distributor, also in Mount Vernon.

Well, private school for me meant only one type of school; and that was a Catholic high school. For a lower to middle-class Italian Roman Catholic family, no other options were even considered. It was understood that this was how it was to be.

In New York City, just because someone decided they wanted to go to a private Catholic high school, it was not automatically guaranteed. There were literally waiting lines to get into these schools which made it very competitive. As a result, in the Spring of my 8th grade year, I had to take a three to four hour exam in order to be considered for

acceptance. A child could only select up to four schools as their preferred choices for attendance.

I distinctly remember as I sat in my seat just prior to receiving the test packet, with whatever understanding and knowledge of God that I had, I prayed, asking Him to please allow me to do well enough to get accepted to at least one school that I had listed.

It was several weeks later that I found out that indeed I had scored well enough to be accepted to two of the four schools on my list. This was such a wonderful relief.

As a result, I spent my freshman year at Salesian High School in New Rochelle, NY. I liked this school and did well in my studies. However, because of the a two-hour round trip school bus ride, combined with being on the Track team; the twelve-hour day schedule plus evening homework was wearing me out. So before entering my sophomore year, I had transferred to Mount Saint Michael Academy Catholic High School which was only two blocks from my home.

It was while I was a student at the Mount that the 21st Ecumenical Council (The Second Vatican Council 1962 - 1965) was convoked by Pope John XXIII. Amongst other things, perhaps the most significant change made in the Roman Catholic Church was that now all Masses would be said in the local vernacular as opposed to the Latin Vulgate. Moreover, the first Lay Readers were introduced as a part of the Mass wherein that

designated person would read the Collect (Old Testament passage), the Epistle (New Testament passage from the Letters), and a passage from one of the four Gospels. Of course the priest would be the one to give the sermon based upon the universally designated gospel account. While a senior at the Mount in 1964, I was selected to be the first lay reader in our parish at Saint Francis of Assisi in Mount Vernon, NY.

There were however a couple of outcomes from the council's decisions that disturbed me. All my life up to that point, it was considered to be a mortal sin if you ate meat on Fridays. On one occasion I was coming home from school and I stopped at a hot dog stand (there are a lot of street vendors in New York City) and began to eat it when I remembered it was a Friday; so I ended up spitting it out of my mouth.

But now the council decided it was okay to eat meat on Fridays. So yesterday it was a mortal sin, but today it's acceptable. There seemed to be something wrong with this picture. Was it the breaking of God's laws that I feared or man's laws?

And secondly, to add insult to injury, the council decided to de-Canonize St. Christopher, removing him from the universal calendar of feast days. This was the Saint from whom I decided to choose my Confirmation name. These events began to weigh heavily on my mind.

First Year in College (Faith is Lost)

Having graduated high school in the top 10% of my class along with my extra-curricular activities qualified me to be accepted to Fordham University's School of Pharmacology, a Jesuit institution also in the Bronx on Fordham Road at the Rose Hill campus. I was the first in my family to attend college.

However, even before entering Fordham, cracks began to develop in my armor. For instance, while I was functioning in the position of a lay reader, my involvement with girls (let's just say) was less than honorable. This became worse as a freshman in college.

Facing the pressures of being in a larger learning institution (much less personal), and the demands of studies (flunking one semester of biology, chemistry, English, plus two semesters of theology), and the financial responsibilities, all took its toll. The ever present possibility of being drafted into the Vietnam War and the lustful romantic relationship I was having; plus now being convinced of the hypocrisy within the Church, created a very unstable emotional and spiritual mind-set within me.

The end result: I threw out God with the religion; quite similar to the proverbial 'throwing the baby out with the bath water' scenario. Of course, I myself was a hypocrite. I did not decide to be a seeker of truth but I became a seeker of self-gratification. Instead of having a heart after God, I

developed a heart after lust, drunkenness, profanity, anger, hatred, lying, etc.

The Dark Years

This pattern of living in debauchery dominated my life for the next ten years as I became more and more spiritually and morally depraved.

Having made some very bad choices, my life degenerated to a degree that made me one of the lowest of the lowest people on the face of the earth and securely on my way to Hell. The bottom line: **I forsook the God of my youth!**

The Apostle Paul writes in *Ephesians 2:11-12*, ***“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world...”***

What a miserable existence: having no hope and living without God in this world. Whether you know it or not, this world is a hostile place. There are many pitfalls, snares and traps that lie in wait both seen and unseen. You will need a friend!

As you may know, the challenges and demands of life have a way of putting a fear into you; “Like how am I going to make a living?” [A fear for survival.]

Of course, the fear that I lacked was the fear of God; and as a result I was most miserable and not willing to admit it. For ***‘the fear of the Lord is to hate evil...’ (Proverbs 8:13a)***

And let’s not forget ***that the way of the transgressor is hard (Proverbs 13:15)***; and ***there is no peace for the wicked (Isaiah 48:22 & 57:21)***.

By May of 1966, I decided to drop out of Fordham even though they were willing to allow me to continue matriculation if I agreed to repeat my freshman year.

I had enough sense to realize if I wasn’t serious the first time around, I wouldn’t get it right trying it all over again. Besides, what was the point, since I would only be allowed to get three more years of a college draft deferment? It was the policy of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration to allow a maximum of four years for a college deferment which meant even if I succeeded the next three years, I would not be allowed to complete my degree.

So here I was in this big world (19 years old), and on the doorstep to making many major decisions over the next ten years that would affect the rest of my life; **all without God!**

Decisions such as:

- Should I continue my college education, and if so, where?
- What should I study?

- Should I join the military or should I take my chances with the draft?
- What kind of a career should I pursue?
- Who should I work for?
- Can I get a draft-deferred job?
- Where will I live?
- Should I get married?
- Who shall I marry?
- Should I have children?
- How shall I raise my children?

All these are life-changing, life-directing and long-lasting decisions.

It just so happened that in the winter of 1966 I received a post-card in the mail advertising a two-year technical college named the Academy of Aeronautics in Queens, NY across from LaGuardia Airport and the Grand Central Parkway.

This seemed to be a great compromise to my situation since I still had three years remaining to my college deferment. So to earn money for school, I worked all summer at the Hellgate Station U.S. Post Office in East Harlem, East 110th St., Manhattan, NY (just as I did over the summer of 1965 at the Lenox Hill station on East 70th Street, Manhattan, NY).

The school operated on a trimester basis. So my plan was to go to school year round and graduate in exactly two years, which is what I did. They offered three programs of study: Design Technology, Electronics Technology and Aircraft Maintenance.

I chose the Electronics Technology program offering an A.A.S. two-year degree.

However, while attending my first trimester and sitting at my drafting table, I had a sobering thought; an epiphany of sorts. And the thought was this: “I don’t want to live with my parents for the rest of my life; so I had better make something out of my life.”

From that point on I began to study extremely hard and took classes very seriously. Since I had transferred a few credits from my year at Fordham, my schedule at the Academy of Aeronautics was split. Most of my classes were during the day, but I had to take some evening classes anywhere from two to four days per week.

I didn’t have a lot of money, nor did I own a car. So in order to save money, I paid another student who lived in my neighborhood to ride with him to and from school; except I took the subway home when I had evening classes.

Due to my split schedule and lack of transportation, it was out of the question to try and go home after the daytime classes and then return in the evening. This would require two round trips over the Whitestone Bridge between the Bronx and Queens, plus the cost of the tolls. This option was both cost and time prohibitive.

So instead of going home between the daytime and evening classes, I stayed in the school library and studied all day. Although an above average student,

I wouldn't consider myself to be a brilliant person. However when you end up studying eight hours a day, one is bound to do well. As it turned out, I ended up graduating at the top of the class with honors.

The Beginning of My Career

Indeed, graduating at the top of the class opened up the door for me to be hired by AT&T Bell Laboratories at their facility in Whippany, New Jersey in September 1968. My classes ended on Friday, September 20, I graduated on Sunday, September 22, and started work the very next day.

Although I had job offers from the FBI, the CIA, AT&T Long Lines, Western Electric, plus the Murray Hill Bell Labs campus; there was one significant difference about the Bell Labs campus at Whippany. It was at this Whippany location where much of the Department of Defense (DOD) contract work was being performed and thus presented the best chance of securing a draft-deferred job.

Considering the high probability of being drafted into the Vietnam conflict, it was a no-brainer as to which job I chose to accept.

It is well known that the Vietnam War was not a popular conflict, creating a great rift within our country. Although there were some who would choose to leave the country (fleeing to Canada and Mexico, etc.), I did not consider that to be a valid option. I considered leaving the country an act of

cowardice. If it turned out that I would be drafted and had to serve, I would have done it. However, given the opportunity to avoid the draft legally, I would certainly accept.

I have always had great respect for those who served, either voluntarily or involuntarily. I never had any disdain for our troops as a whole, nor considered mistreating them as they returned home from the battlefields. My objections (although kept to myself – I was not a public protestor) were directed towards the politicians and their handling of the entire situation.

Now after working one full year at Bell Labs, I had earned one week of paid vacation time. This was a welcomed event because I had not had a vacation since the summer of 1963 which is when I began working during the summer school breaks to help fund my education. So in the fall of 1969, a friend of mine and I flew to Miami Beach for a week arriving on a Saturday and returning the next Saturday.

On the Sunday night after returning from Miami, I decided to spend the last night of my vacation by visiting the Mushroom Farm in East Orange, New Jersey; a bar and dance joint. It was there where I met my future wife as we were to marry eleven months later in August of 1970. We were married in an Episcopal church, a no-no in the sight of my Roman Catholic family. But I did not care. Remember at this point in time I was godless.

After being married for less than one year, my company announced that I would be transferred to Atlanta, Georgia in January 1972 to help open up the world's largest copper cable plant. I wondered why. It was because the DOD contract under which I was being funded for the development of the Nike-Zeus Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) system had ended. This was the result of the SALT-I Treaty (Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty) between President Nixon and Russia that had been negotiated to limit the development of ICBMs (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Systems). Of course this meant that my draft-deferred status would also be ending. But by that time there was a new draft lottery system (based on a person's birthday) in place that would make everyone eligible for the draft regardless of job affiliation. The saving grace for me was that my birthday date was drawn as number 250. The highest number to be drafted reached 197.

Life Without God

Now over time, we had two sons, the eldest born in June 1973, and the youngest in June 1975. Just before our six-year anniversary, the marriage was showing signs of strain. My wife even considered taking the children and leaving me at one point. Being more spiritually sensitive than me, my wife at this time had been trying to cultivate a relationship with God within the Episcopal Church. However, during the 10 years (1966 to 1976) spanning the ages of 19 to 29, I did not willfully choose to acknowledge anything about God or religion. So

much so, that I got to the point where I actually forbid my wife from having anything to do with God and/or the church.

The job front also had its problems. After eight years at the same entry-level position (somewhat embarrassing to say the least), I had been considered for promotion three times, only to be rejected each time. At this point I had developed a great hatred and contempt for my immediate supervisor; and I was actively pursuing leaving the company. Although my technical job performance was satisfactory, I am convinced that the management's reluctance to promote me had more to do with the deficiencies in my disposition and personality than it did with my technical abilities.

Back home, finally, in desperation, with whatever knowledge my wife had about God, she cried out to Him pleading for the salvation of our marriage. I was not aware that she had done such a thing.

Literally within days of that prayer, some very interesting things began to happen. It was the Spring of 1976 and as I was standing on my driveway in Lilburn, Georgia on a late Sunday morning, ready to cut my grass, I watched my neighbors drive home from church. And I clearly recall saying within myself: “**What do these people know that I don't know?**” Now you know that the devil didn't put that thought into my mind. Moreover, at that time my impression was that all church-going people truly loved God.

An Evangelical Voice

Also, within a couple of weeks from that moment of reflection on my driveway, there was a newly hired person who had joined the group at work. It was in June of 1976, and the fellow they hired was a Ph.D. from Cal Tech who had just left his position as an Associate Professor at Texas A & M. It turned out that he was originally from Georgia where his mother and sister still resided, and moreover they were both spirit-filled Christians. This fellow had done his undergraduate work at Georgia Tech, and his masters at Miami University and then his Ph.D. at Cal Tech.

He also was a relatively new spirit-filled Christian and a vocal one at that. By that I mean at the workplace he would walk along the hallways greeting group members in their offices addressing each one with comments like: “Praise the Lord”, “Hallelujah” and “Jesus loves you”. One day as he passed by my office, he stood at the doorway and recited the same phrases. Now provoked, as I sat in my office chair, I leaned back in it and quickly extended my left leg towards him with a motion of a karate kick, and said, “Get out of here you Jesus freak”. Unfazed, he just leaned against the doorpost and calmly responded with, “Well, you’ve got to love me before you go to heaven”; and quietly walked away. (As I found out many months later, he walked back to his office in the next aisle and prayed for me.)

Within a few days of this incident, my management informed me that, effective immediately, I would be

assigned to this fellow as his assistant. (You can't tell me that God doesn't have a sense of humor.) I was a lab technician and he was a lead engineer which meant that he would design an experiment and I would conduct the experiment in the laboratory.

He turned out to be a good sport about the prior incident where I called him a Jesus freak and never brought it up to me. We worked together quite well. He was a personable fellow and since on most days we both bagged our lunches, he invited me to eat with him in his office since lead engineers had private offices. I accepted, and as we ate our lunch with me sitting across his desk, he pulls out a Bible and asks me if I minded if he read the Bible. Even though I was neither loving nor serving God, I said that I did not mind, commenting that it was no skin off my nose. Thinking to myself: "I'm from New York City and I have seen everything". (Of course in hindsight, I thought I had seen everything, until I saw the power of God.)

This scene took place just about every workday for a period of six months. Over time he had invited other colleagues to participate and join us over the lunch hour. It ended up where we would typically have four to six people gathering in his office during lunch. Again, in hindsight, I found out much later that all he was doing was taking the scriptures that he had heard on his Sunday morning and evening services, plus the midweek service, and reviewing them with us and for his own personal study time. He did not preach per se, but would ask questions, solicit questions, make simple comments,

and share his personal experiences. (By the way, all during this time, I never mentioned to my wife that I was sitting in on a Bible study at work over the lunch hour.)

He would always open up with a prayer and close with a prayer; and then we would all go back to work. Outwardly, there was absolutely no change in my disposition or behavior. It was as if what had been said was going in one ear and out the other. Then one day after he closed with a prayer and everyone else returned to work, I remained in his office (not an unusual thing since I was his assistant) and I said, “You know while you were praying, I felt like getting down on my hands and knees and ask Jesus to forgive me.” He looked at me and said, “Well, why don’t you?” I replied, that this wasn’t a church. He said that it didn’t have to be. That if I was truly penitent and genuinely sincere, that Jesus would hear me and meet me right here and now.

I paused for more than a few seconds as I meditated on what to do next, and then I looked at him and said, “**Jesus Won’t Forgive Me For The Things That I Have Done**”.

He looked me in the eyes and emphasized that He would indeed forgive me if I were truly sorry, as he said, “**O yes He will**”. With renewed hope and a child-like faith, I believed him! Right there in his office at my workplace, I raised my hands to heaven and prayed a prayer of repentance and faith towards God.

Immediately, while still sitting in my chair, I perceived three things that happened to me. First, I knew that Jesus was real and alive. There are a lot of real people that are in the grave, but I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that this man Jesus was not in His grave but was right there in the room with me and touched me in a most wonderful way. Secondly, I knew I was forgiven. I felt a peace (both physically and spiritually) that I had never experienced before. It was as if someone had lifted a 300-pound bar bell off of my shoulders. My conscience was clear! It was well with my soul!

Finally, I felt a supernatural hunger and thirst in my heart to study the Word of God. You see, when you first meet someone, you may have been formally introduced, but you do not know anything about the person. The truth was that I didn't know much about this Jesus that had just set me free from eternal damnation. I didn't know what He liked and what He didn't like. I didn't know what He should expect of me, and what I should expect of Him. In a nutshell, I didn't know the character of God.

If someone tells me that they met Jesus, I say that that's good but I'm not necessarily impressed. I like to ask, "What do you know about Him?" When you first meet someone, you may know their name and where they live and work, but you don't know much about their life unless you spend time with them and converse.

Therefore If Any Man Be in Christ...

It happened to be on a Wednesday when I repented of my sins and the fellow that led me to the Lord told me of a church meeting that night in Stone Mountain, Georgia at Our Shepherd's church where an Evangelist would be speaking. He invited me and my family to come to that meeting. For the first time in over ten years I actually wanted to go to church and be around God's people. So I agreed to go to the meeting, but I had to face my wife!

That evening after work I went home at the usual time and sat down to dinner, not saying a word about what had happened that day. After we finished dinner, with my two boys still at the table, and my wife washing dishes at the kitchen sink, I said to her, "How would you like to go to church tonight?"

You know when Jesus sets you free, you really do not care what people say or think. But I was ready for whatever criticism, harsh or otherwise, that she would be throwing at me. I deserved it!

After I asked her the question, she immediately turned to me (surely to size up my countenance) to see if I was mocking or serious. For the subject of God and church had been the source of much contention in our home. As she continued to stare at me for a few moments, she somehow perceived that this was not a subject I would ever bring up in jest.

As a testimony to the strong and tender loving character of my sweet wife, to my surprise, she did not deride nor deliver a scathing rebuke towards me. She knew that I was serious, and then proceeded to ask me when we had to leave. I said that we had to leave in fifteen minutes. She stopped washing the dishes, grabbed the boys, quickly changed clothes, and off we went. That was the beginning of our ever joyful walk with Jesus. Thank you Jesus!

It was November 1976 when I gave my life to Jesus, and by January 1977 both my wife and I were enrolled in Bible Training School. We attended school together for two years. After that the Bible Training School grew into a full-scale degree-offering Bible College. I proceeded to attend school for ten years at night, receiving a Bachelor of Religious Education degree in June 1987. I want to emphasize that I did not attend the college for the sole purpose of receiving a degree on a piece of paper. My main purpose was to learn about Jesus and to get to know Him more and more.

What Happened?

Through the presence, and power of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God finally penetrated my heart of stone. It took a hold of my mind to the point that I was now vividly aware of my depraved condition; and somehow knew that it was only Jesus who could make me clean and whole.

Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is quick (alive), and powerful, and sharper than any

twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” This is exactly what had happened to me! The word of God is true!

If you think about it, I gave my own altar call; and as I minister now, I rather prefer it that way. I prefer not to have such important decisions to be based solely on emotion. I seek the presence of and alliance with the Holy Spirit to truly touch someone and make a real difference in their lives. For it’s the anointing that breaks the yoke (***Isaiah 10:27***).

It reminds me of two similar New Testament events as recorded in the book of Acts. The first incident is recorded in ***Acts 2:14-47*** where Peter stood up to preach before thousands on the day of Pentecost. Highlighting ***verses 36-43***.

³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

³⁷Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, **Men and brethren, what shall we do?**

³⁸Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

³⁹For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call.

⁴⁰And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

⁴¹Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.

⁴²And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

⁴³And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

The second incident is recorded in Acts 16:25-34 where Paul and Silas, being imprisoned, began to pray and sing praises unto God at midnight. Then God caused an earthquake to occur and everyone's bands were loosed. Note the response of the jailer after thinking that all the prisoners had escaped.

²⁵And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

²⁶And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

²⁷And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

²⁸But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

²⁹Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

³⁰And brought them out, and said, **Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**

³¹And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

³²And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

³³And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their* stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

³⁴And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

A Personal Note

I will forever be guilty! But I never have to carry the burden of guilt for my past sins that have been washed away by the blood of Jesus.

As the man on death row, who after many years of incarceration, and many appeals (attempts) to secure a release, is suddenly pardoned by the Governor, only because of true remorse. Not acquitted, still guilty; still deserving of death; but by grace and mercy is set free!

The Holy Spirit brought me back to the time when I was 19 years old after having thrown out God with the religion. My repentance included all the wicked diabolical deeds that I committed over the following ten-year period.

My favorite book in the Bible is the gospel according to Saint John. My favorite chapter in the Bible is the 10th chapter of Acts. But my favorite verses in the Bible are *Romans 10:13-21*.

¹³For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

¹⁴How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

¹⁵And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

¹⁷So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

¹⁸But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

¹⁹**But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by *them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.***

²⁰**But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.**

²¹But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.

Now we know that *verses 19 & 20* are prophecies about how Jesus Messiah would come to his own (the lost sheep of the house of Israel); and as a whole the Jews received Him not. But then God would turn His grace and mercy towards the Gentiles. For me personally, this verse speaks to the fact that indeed I was not and did not seek or ask

after Jesus (as I should have); but in His goodness He sought after me and manifested Himself to me in a very mighty way. Blessed be the name of the Lord Jesus!

To those who think that because they have achieved academic success, business success, fame, great fortune, etc. may suppose that worldly gain is godliness. Think again. ***“For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?” (Luke 9:25)***

The scriptures declare in *1 Corinthians 1:26*. ***“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.”*** It did not say, ‘**not any**’!

In my Christian walk, there have been good times and there have been bad times. I like the good times better. The Bible says that although we are in the world, we are not of it. There may be times when some ‘religious’ people whom you may be very close to greatly disappoint. **Do not despair, and please, don’t throw out God with the religion!**

Some Scriptural References For The Serious-Minded Thinker.

Isaiah 55:6-7⁶ “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: ⁷Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Psalms 34:18 “The LORD *is* nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”

Isaiah 57:15 “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

Psalms 51:17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”

Isaiah 43:25 “I, *even I, am* he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

Hebrews 8:10-12 ¹⁰For this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: ¹¹And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every

man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. ¹²For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Hebrews 10:16-18 ¹⁶This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; ¹⁷And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. ¹⁸Now where remission of these *is*, *there is* no more offering for sin.

Addendum

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord:

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary:

Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died and was buried:

He descended into hell:

The third day he rose again from the dead:

He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father:

From thence he shall come to judge the quick (living) and the dead:

I believe in the Holy Ghost:

I believe in the holy catholic (universal) church:

The communion of saints:

The forgiveness of sins:

The resurrection of the body:

And the life everlasting.

Amen.