

Sinner to Saint on All Hallows Eve

It was April of 1988, I was thirty-five years old, begrudgingly sitting in a church that didn't seem very 'churchy', not a single pane of stain glass anywhere. I was waiting for my older brother and sister to get baptized. I grew annoyed as I thought of the changes in them. Why in the world were they doing this? After all, hadn't we been raised in a Christian family? We attended church almost daily. We had attended parochial schools where we learned and memorized our catechisms. We received the sacraments. Did these baptisms mean that none of that counted? My goodness they were standing in a baptistry waist high in water. They looked a little ridiculous and I became uneasy during their testimonies. They used words like repent, believe, born again, saved, and following Jesus. I had conflicting emotions. One was irritation at the whole superfluous act, another was an unsettling curiosity about why. Why were my otherwise sensible siblings willing to submit to such a dramatic display in order to follow Jesus Christ?

Little did I know that day that God had already begun the process of drawing me to Himself. Over the next six months, even in my confused state, God kept 'highlighting' His Truth for me, amplifying the volume whenever His Son's name came up in reverent context. Unbeknownst to me, my heart was being prepared to receive some visitors; actually two small v visitors accompanied by one capital V Visitor. On October 31st of that year, two men made their way through trick or treaters and my tombstone graveyard to knock on my door. They had come for one purpose, to share the gospel. As I look back, there is simply no way I can bypass the irony of this scene. Two righteous fishers of men, making their way through a mockery of death to bring me words of eternal life. I will never forget the feeling I had sitting at my kitchen table as they shared the "good news" impervious to distracting doorbell rings. They began talking about Jesus, the God man I thought I already knew, but this time, something was different. I knew what they were saying was True in a whole new sense. Jesus had really come to earth. He actually left heaven and came here to die on a cross to pay for sin. Not just for the sins of mankind but for my sins. He came and died for me personally. Yes, I believed.*

How can I explain what happened to me next? Being changed by the Holy Spirit from the inside out is almost inexplicable. A hundred emotions competed for the surface. For the first time I began to understand what a horrible sinner I was. I realized I was not to be graded on a curve, that one white lie was enough to separate me from such a Holy God. I repented with a gut wrenching outpouring of sadness that Jesus willingly paid for my sins so that I could join Him in eternity. Amidst this grief was a joy and peace I had

never known. I knew I had been forgiven. Scriptures I'd been learning came alive as I began to understand that because I believed, I had also been forgiven.

God put new desires on my heart. He showed me that my foul language was not what He had in mind when He made my mouth. Books, radio and television shows that entertained me before were suddenly repulsing me. He stayed close to me while friends backed away. Where I gave up a vice He strengthened me. He taught and comforted me exactly as He had promised. I couldn't wait to attend worship with my 'new family' in Christ on Sundays and sing all those hymns filled with Truth. I will never forget Christmas that year. Scripture filled Christmas Carols like Oh Holy Night came to life as my newly awakened heart rejoiced in the deep theology they contained.

Since then God has equipped me, in spite of all my weaknesses, to serve Him. I have had the joy of teaching or sharing the gospel with Sunday school kids, neighbors, recovery groups, racquetball players, the homeless, clergy, ESL students from many countries, family members, my children's friends, and even an elderly gentlemen I had a fender bender with one day. He has given me the joy of serving the women in various bible studies watching them grow under His tutelage and loving care. I know He has great plans for me. I look forward to serving Him today, tomorrow, and throughout eternity.

Carole requested that the following dedication be appended to her testimony:

I dedicate the writing of this testimony to my two favorite fisherman: my first shepherd and former Pastor, Professor Don Whitney and Evangelist and Pastor Jim Elliff. I am unspeakably grateful that they allowed themselves to be mightily used by God to make a house call one October night.