My Personal Faith Story

Ron Berrus

Growing up on a farm, even though I never attended church, I always knew there had to be a Creator. I knew there was way too much design for the universe to be an accident. But who God was or if you could know Him, I had no clue. I had moved away from home when I was fifteen. I worked hard and partied hard. Working on farms and paying my own way, I figured I was an average guy; no worse, and certainly no better than the next guy. Occasionally I would wonder about it all, but never seriously until I got my draft lottery notice. The Vietnam War was raging, and within two weeks of getting my draft notice my first cousin and my next door neighbor were both killed in Nam. That set me searching for answers. I mean, if I were killed, then what. I had no clue. I guessed that maybe, if there was a God, then when you died He'd take your good and bad and put it on a scale, and if your good outweighed the bad, then you'd have a good a shot at getting into heaven. Then I found out I was wrong; dead wrong.

I was acquainted with a guy who really seemed to have his head on straight. He had a kind of serenity and certainty about himself. I had heard he was religious, so I had mostly avoided him. But being on my own personal faith journey, it seemed safe to ask him a question. So I did. I asked him, "What makes you tick, man? Why are you the way the way you are?" He reached into his pocket and pulled out a little booklet and said, "If you really want to know, the answer's in there" and he walked away. I stuck his little booklet in my jeans and later that night, after work, I pulled it out and read it. It was a bunch of statements from the Bible. That was news to me. I had never read the Bible. The words were simple, but life changing for me.

The Bible's message was that I had been made by God for a relationship with Him. But all of us, me included, had screwed it up by running away from Him. God has told us what to do to live a life of love and peace, but instead, I was doing my own thing and causing problems and pain everywhere I went. Oh sure, sometimes I helped people. But it didn't change the fact that inside I was selfish, arrogant, self-willed and rebellious again God and men. And the result of this rebellion (the Bible calls it "sin") is death. Death is God's righteous sentence as the judgment on sin. I came to understand that death is separation. Physical death is separation of the soul from the body. Spiritual death is this inner separation from God that leaves me blind and deaf to God's reality and truth. And if I am not radically changed, I will eventually end up in eternal death, forever separated from God in hell, which by the way, is exactly what I deserve as an evildoer. If I live life running away from God, then at death I get what I want… life away from God forever.

I am so thankful that the Bible doesn't just tell us the bad news that explains why we ourselves and our whole world is so messed up. But the Bible also tells us God's solution for our inescapable problem. The solution is His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was one with God forever. God sent Him to come to earth and take on human form and live a perfect life of love, peace and obedience. In Jesus we see what God is really like and what we should be like. But He did more than show us a perfect example. He laid down His life as the perfect substitute, satisfying God's righteous judgment against our sin. Jesus had no sin of His own, and so could satisfy God's judgment by taking all our sins on Himself and dying in our place. God accepted His sacrifice as complete payment for all sin, and raised Jesus from the dead to prove it.

The Bible's message is that if we will admit our sins, accept the truth that we deserve God's judgment, and turn in faith to Jesus, God will forgive our sins. That day, I came to believe the Bible's message. I recognized that I was sinful and deserving of God's punishment. I also believed Jesus, the perfect Son of God, took my sin on the cross and satisfied God's righteous judgment as my substitute and savior. I placed all my trust in Jesus alone to rescue me from sin and death.

From that day to this, I have been on a journey of faith in Jesus Christ, knowing that I am forgiven and that I will spend eternity with Jesus in heaven. I finally have the peace and purpose in life I longed for. It's all in Jesus Christ, and it's available for anyone who will believe His message and trust in Him.

My Personal Faith Story

Wayne Haston

Life Before:
- **Before Christ**
- **False Beliefs**

I grew up in a religious home and my mother took me to church most of the time. So, as a kid, I heard about God and learned a lot of the stories in the Bible. But at the time I didn't understood what all of that meant. For some reason, I thought that I had to be "good" to go to heaven. But the older I got the more I realized that I couldn't be good and I wasn't even sure that I wanted to be. There were too many fun things in life to do that I knew weren't good. So as a teenager, my life begin to deteriorate.

Then one day, my best friend began dating a young lady who claimed to be a Christian. That wasn't new for me because I knew a lot of people who claimed to be Christians. But there was something different about her. She lived like I thought a true Christian probably should live. My buddy lied to her and told her that he was also a Christian, just so she would date him. The first thing I knew, he was going to church with her regularly.

It wasn't long until someone told me that my friend had gotten "saved". I didn't know exactly what that meant, but I cautiously watched his life the next few times I saw him. It didn't take me long to realize that something very real had happened to him.   It all seem weird to me.

Life Change:
- **Truth Encounter**
- **Faith Response**

Then one Saturday night my buddy found me and told me he'd like to talk to me about what had happened in his life. We went to my house and he opened the Bible and read some verses to me. He showed me from the Bible that God loved me even though I was a sinner who had broken God's laws. Then he told me the good news that God's Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth to live a perfect life and to die in my place on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins, so that I could receive the forgiveness of sins and go to heaven to live forever with God.

That night, I told God that I knew I had sinned against him, but that I sincerely wanted to have my sins forgiveness and receive His gift of eternal life through what Jesus did for me on the cross.

God changed my life that night. Based upon the promises God has given me in the Bible, I know that my sins have been forgiven and that God is preparing a place in heaven for me. And on top of all of that, God gives me peace and joy that I never experienced before I became a true Christian.

Life Now:
- **New Life**

My Personal Faith Story

Dave Southwell

I grew up in rural northern Michigan in a traditional family who were dedicated Christians. We were always in church when the doors were open. I grew up learning most of the Bible stories and memorizing key Bible verses. We also read the Bible at home nearly every day. By the time I was ten I had a lot of Bible knowledge for that age, and I was baptized.

Although I don't recall any traumatic experiences, and my upbringing was in a secure environment, I was still unsettled in my heart and mind. I experienced fear thinking about my final destination if I were to die. I had no confidence that I had forgiveness for the sin I had learned about and I knew I had in my heart. I feared judgment and eternal punishment. I had a fear of being "left behind" when Jesus returned to the earth, as I had heard taught.

All this time God was teaching me about Himself and preparing me for when I was 13 years old. It was then I came to realize all of my good life was of no value before a perfect God. It wasn't my parents, my spiritual heritage, my church, or just knowing about God and the Bible that could grant me spiritual and eternal life. I believed Jesus was the Son of God, had died to pay the penalty for my sins, and had been raised from the dead.

One night as I lay in my bed, it was like a light came on: Spiritual life comes through a relationship with God, not through a religion. That relationship –becoming a child of God –comes only through trusting in Jesus Christ as the only way to God. The Bible verse that I had memorized years earlier sank into my heart, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God…." That night I understood my need to "receive" Christ and I placed my trust in Christ alone for my salvation; for forgiveness of my sin.

My outward life did not change much because of the cultural and family setting I grew up in. But inwardly my fears concerning my eternal destiny began to fade away. I began to realize I was secure in Christ and I would not be judged and separated from God for eternity. On the contrary, I would live with him in a perfect paradise when I died. I know I'm far from being a perfect person. On the outside I might often look like a good person, but I know my thoughts are not always right and good; pride and self centeredness creep in all too easily. But I have the confidence that in spite of imperfection and sin, I am God's child by grace through faith in Jesus as my Savior. It's great to "rest" in Him and in that assurance.

My Personal Faith Story

Gil Thomas

My parents were very religious and took my brothers and sisters and me to church every time the doors were open. They felt they were being disobedient if something was happening at church and they were not there! Church was cool enough because we went bowling, skiing, tobogganing—you name it! It was fun to part of the church group.

But even though I was not a rebellious kid, God and His church did not mean anything to me. I was very involved: attending services, helping elderly people, singing in the choir—even memorizing verses—but I did not internalize anything. I had a sense of right and wrong that I had gained from my mom and dad and the church and really didn't desire things that were considered taboo (like drinking and drugs, etc.). But it wasn't because I was trying to please God. It just seemed to make sense. I reasoned with myself, "Those things can hurt you and ruin your life. Why would anyone want to do that?" I was living life on my own and I thought I was doing fine.

But when I was twelve, a man shared with me from the Bible about who God is and who I am. For the first time I understood how holy God is and how I was just the opposite—doing my own thing in my own way—and not meeting up to God's standard of holiness. Even though I was happy doing "right" things and even "religious" things (going to church, being active in Christian youth activities) and I appeared to be just like the others, I knew inside that I was not like them. I also knew that my thoughts and the things I did when people weren't looking were not pure.

I saw that I was destined for hell in that state and this upset me quite a bit. The fact that my personal attitude and actions were what was offensive to God upset me even more—to the point of tears. But I also learned that night that Jesus died on the cross and that if I would put my trust in Him, I would receive life from God.

And that is exactly what happened. When I changed my mind, quit trying to make it on my own, and depended on Jesus Christ and His work on the cross, God changed my whole life and how I looked at life. I began to experience joy and purpose in life. Now I want to serve Him while I can in gratitude for all that He did for me and I am eagerly anticipating life with God in heaven.