



## Florida City, FL

I don't just have a time where I did not believe or never knew the truth, then heard the Word through someone talking to me or preaching, and then suddenly believed, and accepted Christ as my Savior. Jesus was being instilled in me from my beginning as a young child or toddler, and I had always been read to in children's Bible studies, and reading children's books about the Bible while growing up as well as being taken to church on Sundays. But over the years, as I got older, there was a lot more I needed to understand about my purpose here. For the life that God created me for, then understanding what it really means to be born again, and how to stay out of the things the flesh wants to do and stay walking in the Spirit. Being born again in Christ means we receive God's Spirit, and we must renew our minds only by God's Word, the Bible, and also through Christian literature. We must grow, and one key way to help speed up our spiritual growth is to start retraining your mind with the Word of God and retraining your body to do the good works of God's Word that's being planted into your mind from reading the Bible and Christian literature. Plus, hearing the Word being taught or preached. The fleshly person naturally wants to do its own things, but it goes against God because of living in sin. Only through Jesus Christ can we break free from the chains of sin and spiritual death. **G.H.**

## Grovetown, GA

Some of our most important needs are the sense of belonging and acceptance by others. Parallel

to these would be the love and affection we gain from others and how they view us. It brings to mind when I was a teacher and a child would engage in negative behavior for their desperate need of attention. We can form very easily to our sociological environment whether it be good or bad, so confirming the old saying, "Birds of a feather flock together." In first Corinthians 15:33, the apostle Paul writes, "Bad company corrupts good morals." With all this in mind, in today's world, a man achieves his self-worth through his accomplishments and his appearance is secondary. For a woman, in most cases, her appearance proceeds her accomplishments. Prime examples of these would be Donald Trump and his wife. We know that through his accomplishments in real estate he became a billionaire. His wife on the other hand, made her millions by her appearance as a world class model. To a much lesser degree, I found that this applied to my life as well. I received love, affection and acceptance from others in my accomplishments at playing football. I was an Allstate guard and All Tri-regional linebacker. You could say, although I wouldn't admit it at the time, that football was my god. It was responsible for self-worth and identity. I was in love and dated our homecoming queen who was the most popular and prettiest girl on campus. This continued and was magnified more so playing college ball. But when it abruptly ended, I was devastated to say the least! No longer did I receive press clipping trophies and attention I counted onto to fulfill my self-worth. It wasn't until a pastor made

me aware of my status and position with God through His Son Jesus Christ. The pastor first quoted John 1:12 which says, "But as many as received Him (Christ), to them gave he the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.." It was then I asked which I'd rather be, a football star (which is temporal) or a child of God (which is eternal)? The answer was obvious. He then pointed out to me that regardless of our appearance, through Christ, we are a sweet aroma unto God. 1 Corinthians 2:15 says, "For we are a sweet aroma of Christ to God among those who are perishing...". In the Old Testament or covenant, the blood sacrificed from certain specified unblemished animals for the sins of the people was a sweet aroma to God. In the New Testament, again Christ's blood was and is the final sacrifice provided by God himself. (see John 3:16.) Finally, the pastor said that God accomplishes His work through us as told in 2 Corinthians 5:20. "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making his plea through us." In 1 Peter 4:10 it says, "As each one has a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." We, as His children are His stewards as well. The question now becomes, what is your god? Is it related to sports, politics, other professions, or organizations, including gangs to establish self-worth and identity? Or could your god be what our society deems more sinister in craving sex, drugs, or alcohol? Regardless of what it is, if it is anything other than the pursuit of Christ, you are on thin ice with hot skates with God! In living the true Christian life, don't expect

things will be all cherries and roses. Christ said rather that we should expect persecutions, trials, and tribulations like He endured (see John 15:28-21). As true believers, we look forward to Christ's second coming and again while in this life, our main goal is to become more in the likeness of Him by following the instructions of God's Word. **S.P.**

#### **Oakwood, VA**

I grew up a preacher's kid. Every Sunday, Sunday night, and Wednesday night I had to attend services. Back then it never meant anything to me and was just something I despised doing. Throughout my adult life, I have broken every commitment I could break. I persecuted the Christians and the church. Little did I ever know that I was on a path of self-destruction. Many times I had attempted suicide. Any drug I could get my hands on would do. I would sleep around, steal money, and rob you blind. Then one day I committed a crime that got me a life sentence. God had had enough of my foolishness. I remember the night well. I was strung out from the drugs I was able to get here in prison. God came knocking on my door. I asked for forgiveness and surrendered all to Him. He delivered me from my addiction and made me whole. A lot has happened since then. I now preach the gospel to the lost at our chapel and I testify to anyone and everyone who will listen.

**S. S.**

#### **Huntsville, TX**

Before I found Christ, I lived a life full of lust and addictions, and I was constantly searching for something to fill the hole in my heart that was getting bigger. There was nothing that was good to me, I hated everyone and everything in this world. I acted viciously, aggressive and violent to everyone.

I knew of Jesus Christ and I even hated Him because of my abuse and neglect as a kid. So, once I was 12 years old, after being baptized at 10 years old, I sat in a Bible study at a family member's house. I decided that I wanted to be a minister because I began to hate the person that I was becoming and didn't want to see another child go through what I was going through. But I continued to rebel against God in living a sinful life that continued for another 18 years. At 30 years old, being in prison for the second time, I cried out to God and asked Him to save me because I was tired of waking up and looking at the man that stared back at me. When Christ re-entered my heart, I felt a peace that I've never felt, and I now faithfully profess God and express love as I show love and help in His kingdom here on earth. **T. J.**

#### **Hinton, OK**

I was born out of wedlock and never really got to know my dad. I was raised in church all my life and really didn't get saved or baptized until youth camp, which was down in Davis, Oklahoma at Falls Creek. I've been pretty much raised in and around different kinds of abuse growing up and never really had an accountability partner or mentor after I got saved. I was living a lukewarm lifestyle out there on the streets, even though I was going to church all the time. I got into trouble at times after I graduated high school and ended up going to jail and then to prison. I discharged a minimum yard back in March 2010 and even completed my five years probation as well. However, during that time, I met someone in March 2013 and by May 28, 2013 we were married. We had our first son and then on November 1, 2019, we had our twin sons that came a month early and were premature. It wasn't until June 6, 2022 that I got arrested

again and ended up back in jail. While I was in County jail, I decided I was tired of living that lifestyle and decided it was time for a change and came back to Jesus for good and no more games. So I prayed with a few other inmates in jail and was very serious about it. I have really tried to follow Christ and I even have started victory Bible college at JDCC. Until I had to be shipped to a medium yard I was even taking a Christianity class as well as playing in a praise and worship band and I felt like I was growing closer to God, even spiritually as well. I was serving as one of the many inmate deacons down at the chapel and felt like I was being faithful and serving God. However, where I'm at now, I know God can use me here as well. Just not sure how at the moment. As of April 19, 2024 my wife divorced me and I believe that God has something better planned for my life. I lost a great uncle, my grandpa and a cousin in the last two years. Today makes a week that I lost my cousin and on Wednesday makes one year that my grandpa's been gone. I believe Satan's trying to work overtime, but my God is stronger than the devil and I am not going to let Satan win at all!! **J.S.**

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