

## A TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST

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### 1 Peter 3:8-17

Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." [Psalm 34:12-16a] And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

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This is not an expository message based on the Scripture that was just read. But it is to point out that not only should we be ready at all times for when Jesus takes us home, or when we enter into the other side of eternity to where we stand before Jesus and have to give an account for our lives, but that we must too be able to share at any time, our testimony of Jesus Christ. And then to add to that, our lives should be a testimony of Jesus Christ-in our actions as well as our words. The two must be in harmony, else there is a problem

Even before I had began to start writing this paper, while meditating on my life and of how God has brought me to where I am now, I was brought to tears with a bubbling of emotions that was stirred up in my heart. There were many pains, sorrows, struggles, and failures along the way. Many things that I had done, I am not proud of, to say the least. Yet, I don't spend much time looking back on my life as I can say as the Apostle Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20) I know for sure now that I am truly am "born-again" as Jesus had said to Nicodemus "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) I am a "new creation", as the Apostle Paul described of the spiritual transformation that takes

place in a true believer in Christ. I'm certainly not saying that I have fully arrived into God's perfection of me yet but as Paul said, "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." God has me looking forward and not backwards. Even in looking forward God has brought me to the understanding that my focus isn't on the things of this world, it is as the writer of Hebrews said, that we are to be, "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (**Hebrews 12:2**) After all, when you realize that the only good in us come from above, from God, through His Son Jesus, that works in us, there really isn't anything that we can boast about. "But of God [Him] you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us **wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption**— that, as it is written, "**He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.**"

Another part of my not looking back at my past is that it seems that most of the times that I am reminded of my past it is usually the accuser, "the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night" (**Revelation 12:10**) that is bringing it to my attention. Yet, nevertheless, there is value to our testimony as it says in the following verse in Revelation saying, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. " Yes, other people that face the same struggles, addictions, and bondages that I have overcome can be encouraged by my testimony, I hope. Yet, not just I, but all of us should be not only **looking** unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, but we are to be **pointing people to Jesus**, not ourselves. The Apostle John said this, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son." It was God who sent His son Jesus to die on a cross for our sins. "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.**" (**John 3:16-17**) As we are looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, Jesus promises, "**if the Son makes you free, you are free indeed.**" (**John 8:36**)

Thirdly, it has been my experience that it is best not to dispute with God on what He is doing (though admittedly I still sometimes do). That goes for what He is doing in my life as well as what He is doing in someone else's life. God says, "for My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord." (**Isaiah 55:8**), and everything comes about in God's good and perfect time. Paul said in **1 Corinthians 4:4**, "but with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even

judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord." Nevertheless, my testimony ultimately is in coming to the knowledge of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, believing that Jesus died on the cross for my sins against God, bearing my sins upon Himself and that in His Righteousness, I am justified before God and am brought into a right relationship with God as a child of God, a joint-heir with Jesus, and will reign with Him for all of eternity. All of **Romans 8** explains all of that. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." (**Romans 8:1-2**) The part of my life that brought about much stumbling and failure was in what Jesus said in **John 14:15-18**, ""If you love Me, **keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.**" My failures were in not being obedient to God's commandments (His will for my life.) God could not and would not move me forward in life until I was truly repentant. Jesus Himself began His ministry saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (**Mark 1:15**) I had the believe part down well. I knew that I knew that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" as the Holy Spirit revealed to Peter in **John 6:69**. The repentance part? Well, that came and went, over, and over. and over, etc. But praise be to God! "For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity." (**Proverbs 24:16**) Thank God for His Longsuffering and Mercy! "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (**Romans 2:4**) Yes, God is good, all the time!

I grew up in a Christian home to where we went to church every Sunday. I learned that "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." In my teen years I was active with the youth group. My mother was the director of the youth ministry and she eventually received her ordination and was an associate pastor. While I was 14 or 15 years old I accepted Jesus into my life at a Christian youth summer camp. I struggled in my years in High School to continue in my Christian faith and eventually turned to making every effort to be popular and to be liked by the other students. My parents divorced when I was 16 and so in my remaining high school years I became more and more rebellious. I became associated with "friends" that did drugs and drank alcohol. I barely graduated high school. Most of the second half of my senior year I was in solitary detention where I had a desk in the hallway outside of the principals office. I think they just graduated me to get me out of the school. After high school I

went into the Air Force to where I joined up with more "friends" that were very committed to drinking beer and acting like fools. I fit in nicely with that group. After three years in the Air Force, my staff sergeant said that there was a strength reductioning program that was allowing those with three years service to get out a year early. So I took the offer. Once again, I think they may have done that just to get me out of there. There was a pattern developing there. But then I started going to a church and had become roommates with a guy from church. I think I was baptized at that time but I don't remember any of it if I did. I somehow just couldn't relate to the people at church though, they were just too good. When I tried to act good I apparently seemed to be a phony. So, I ended up going back to the crowd that I could relate to, the "partiers". That of course is a worldly way of saying "the sinners". Then, I ended up moving back to my hometown in Illinois and my mother got me set up in an apartment. I enrolled in the junior college and got a job at the local armory. I met a girl at the armory gym and she invited me to church. That period in my life was a major stepping stone toward where God was trying to get me. I became very active in the singles group and it was when I first started doing street evangelism.

The next chapter in my life though was back to my old ways in the world. My girlfriend broke up with me and I had lost my job at the armory because it was dependent on my being in school. I had quit going to school because I was going to school for computer science and I just could not seem to do well in that field. My girlfriend had begun going to a Nazarene Bible college and it just became clear to her that I wasn't meant to be in her life any longer. I had some friends take me up to Moody Bible Institute to look it over to see if God was calling me to that school. One of my mentor friends even gave me a check to get me started. Yet, I just knew in my heart that I wasn't ready for that. I struggled along, with one foot in the world and one foot in the church. I eventually came to another turning point in my life. I was renting a home with a friend of mine, from a friend of ours, and I was laid off from work at a construction company. At that point of my life, I think I was really just a very obnoxious Christian and they just wanted me gone. The pattern continued. Without a job, I wasn't able to pay my part of the rent so I was booted from the home by my friend who was the owner. It was then that I sought the Lord and was led to take a job in a Christian book store. That is where I met my wife. We began attending worship services at her church and I went back to school for a music degree. After I had received my associates degree in music performance I became the worship leader at our church. There was a lot of controversy over the style of worship and it became so unbearable that I quit as worship leader. Meanwhile I was failing in my grades at the University that I had transferred to.

That was the start of my final period of rebellion and falling away from the Lord. For the next 15 years I just did what was in my heart, gardening, working out, playing video games and drinking beer. But then I began to cry out to the Lord, night after night, asking God to deliver me from the bondage I was in. Then, one day, when I thought I was coming to the end of my ability to cope anymore in this life, God saved me. I mean, He really saved me and delivered me. I was sitting on the sofa talking with a couple of my neighbors and said that I just want to tell people about Jesus! That is where God had been leading me to all of those years. Complete surrender to His will. God couldn't change me and move me forward until I received His call of repentance and be willing for God to use me in His way, to share the love and gospel of Jesus Christ.

After that time of confession on the sofa, I began to join one of my neighbors in the ministries that he was involved in, such as going to a nursing home and doing evangelism. I then began to do volunteer work at the church, painting what needed to be painted, fixing what needed to be fixed, helping where help was needed. My wife and I became committed to helping at the food bank, visiting the nursing home, and doing prison ministry. I got baptized again, this time I remember it though. Within a short time, I began leading the ministry team in the local prison and at the nursing home and was the leader of our Kairos prison ministry. What I began to notice is that it seemed as though I was operating in the role of a pastor after our pastor had taken a call at another church. Also, I had several people refer to me as pastor, two of them were from pastors, and once it was from the pulpit. My wife and I began to pray about it and I decided to invite my previous pastor to dinner one day when he happened to be in town. I told him the story of how, as crazy as it sounds, it seems as though God was calling me to be a pastor. He replied that he didn't think that was crazy at all, that it seems as though I had been called to that for some time. Later, when I had the right opportunity, I invited my present pastor to dinner and told him what I told my previous pastor and he said that he could see the anointing of pastor on me. Shortly after that, I invited a pastor to dinner that I was involved in ministry with in the nursing home and at the local prison. He was very supportive as well and gave me some advice about getting into a Bible College. From there, I applied for a ministers license through the IPHC (International Pentecostal Holiness Church) and completed that program within a year. I also enrolled at Holmes Bible College and am now in my third year there. Since the pivotal moment of sitting on the sofa in our living room saying that I just wanted to tell people about Jesus to where I am today has been over six years. Which leads us to where we are here today. Presently we are praying for, in God's time, that we'll have a church building to which we can use as a resource center and have Bible study classes and to where it would operate as our mother church. Yet, I believe with all of my heart that time is short.

Whether for me, or us, I do not know. But time is short. I'm hoping and praying for another seven years to be able to reach as many people as we can with the good news of Jesus Christ. When God puts a burden, a passion for souls in your heart, that's all you want to do—share the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This testimony is not about, as I said earlier, arriving anywhere or finally becoming somebody. It is not really even about me. It is a testimony of how when God calls us, when we are really ready to surrender our will for His, then He can begin to move you forward into His field of great blessings. It all begins in turning away from the desires of the world and looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. My favorite Scripture, or at least the Scripture I use the most besides **John 3:16-17** is **Proverbs 3:5-6**, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." We are being led to an understanding that the "earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" and that all things were made for God's purpose and pleasure and it was and is up to me, to all of us, to get on God's plan and purpose for our lives and not that we try to get God on our plans. It is also God's purpose to get us to long for, to yearn for, dwelling in God's Righteousness and Glory, and to see the face of God, and then to have that perfect communion with our Creator. "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek; That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple" (**Psalms 27:4**) and to bring along as many people as I can to be richly blessed in Jesus Christ our Lord!

Heavenly Father,  
I confess that I have sinned against You. I ask that You forgive me of my sins. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, I confess with my mouth that Jesus is Lord, my Lord, and believe in my heart that You raised Jesus from the dead, so that I can have forgiveness of sins, and be reconciled to You God, My Father. I now commit to You, that I will repent of my sins, and live in the newness of life, in Christ Jesus, my Savior and Lord. Thank You Lord!