

My Testimony

By Rev. Donald P. Jackson

I was born February 25, 1956 and lived out most of my childhood in Tipp City, Ohio. I was raised in the Catholic faith from the time I was born. This was the religious preference of my father and of his relatives as far back as I can trace. My mother, on the other hand, was raised in a Protestant environment. However, her Protestant upbringing was not very strong. Upon marrying my dad, mom converted to Catholicism.

Although I had a very strong Catholic upbringing, I did not seem to be very motivated towards some of the beliefs of the Church. It was not that I did not believe them, but I did not feel directed towards them. My focus from childhood on was towards the Holy Trinity and not really much on the Virgin Mary and the Saints of the Church. This is something that I can not really explain to this day. I did, however, consider myself to be "devoutly Catholic". In fact, for quite some time I even considered the priesthood.

I remained Catholic until I was in my early 30's, at which time I felt the Lord's Hand pulling me into the religious environment that I am in at this time. This is a story which I will relate later in this statement.

I must admit though that I did not at that time have what would be considered a "bolt of lightning out of the blue" type of "born again experience". This puzzled me for quite some time. Many people asked me, after I left the Catholic Church, about the time when I was "born again", and I was always at a loss for words. It was hard for me since I did not have what would be considered the classic born again experience.

I knew the day and time when I recommitted my life to Jesus, but I didn't realize for a long time that that is exactly what had happened... a recommitment! To explain this I have to go back to my childhood, when I was about 13 years old.

When I was 13 I went through the Catholic Sacrament of Confirmation, which is a commitment to the original baptismal vows. Since Catholics are baptized at birth, there is a Sacrament provided so that when individuals reach an age of maturity, they have the opportunity to recommit to the vows that their godparents had made for them when they were baptized.

Perhaps unlike some others, I took the commitment that I made to Jesus Christ during my Confirmation very seriously. I truly know that I completely meant to give myself over to the Lord that day. After much inner self examination and playing back the events in my memory, I know that that is when I gave my life to the Lord.

The events of my life after that time are proof of this fact and are proof of the scripture that Jesus will not let us go. I am not trying to preach "eternal security" here, just the fact that Jesus is always there, trying to bring that one lost sheep back into the fold.

You see, from my teen years to early adulthood, my life took some very nasty turns. When I was about 14, I started running with the wrong crowd. Soon I was doing all of the wrong things. I started drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana. From there I went to much harder drugs. Before I was out of High School I had tried everything on the market, except for shooting up with a needle.

During these High School years I was constantly finding myself in situations which I never should have survived, or at the very least I never should have gotten out of. I knew then, as I know now, it was only through Jesus Christ that I was able to survive those years and the ones that followed.

Things only changed for the worse after I got out of High School and started school in Columbus. I now had my own apartment and nobody watching over me, except the Lord. I began buying and selling more drugs to occupy my free time. The next two years were nothing but going to school and spending the rest of the time partying. Most of the time I was not even able to function properly. I missed a great deal of school and did a lot of things that I am very ashamed of.

While all of this was going on during High School and while in Columbus, I continued going to church every Sunday. This, I felt, would square me with God. I felt this way even though I was loaded whenever I went to church, or anywhere else for that matter.

After graduating from my two-year electronics school in Columbus, I moved back in with my parents while I tried to find work. I did not change the pattern of my life, and spent many nights when I didn't even get home until well after sun-up. My lifestyle continued to deteriorate.

At this time I made a move of desperation. I could not find any work except as a "traveling manager" for Stop-N-Go foods. This involved going into a store, firing the present manager, straightening out all of the problems at that store, then moving to another store. The hours were very long and the pay was very short. It was not at all what I had just spent two years training to do. Therefore, in desperation, I entered the Air Force.

The first six weeks were at Basic Training where, unbeknownst to anyone else, I went through detoxification on my own. It was an extremely rough time for me, but I really felt it bring me closer to God. It's funny how times of trouble always put your focus on the Lord.

Once I was out of Basic Training and was able to join the "real world" again, I immediately went back to my old habits. You wouldn't think that a person could get away with this type of lifestyle in the Air Force, but it was actually quite rampant.

I was stationed in Las Vegas, Nevada for the next 3-1/2 years, which looked to be my kind of town. At this time I also started going out with Billie, who I eventually married. It would be, however, three years before that would happen and we started living together almost from the start of our relationship.

Now this was the straw that broke the camel's back. I had always been able to justify in my mind everything else that I had done wrong. Now, with my Catholic upbringing, I knew that I had crossed a line by living with a woman while not being married. It was at this time that I finally started missing quite a few Sundays at church. Prior to this I had gone almost every Sunday. Now I knew that I had flung everything in the Lord's face. The guilt I felt was tremendous. However, it was not enough to change my sinful ways.

Billie and I moved back to the Dayton area after I got out of the Air Force. We

then shortly thereafter got married. Years later we had our first child. During these years, my lifestyle tamed quite a bit, but I still managed to be quite the partier. Drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes took up a great majority of my time, everything else could wait.

After Billie and I had gotten married, I again felt "proper" in God's eyes and we continued going to church every Sunday. Soon, our second child came along, then shortly after that we moved into an old farm house on Fishburg Rd. This brings us up to late 1987.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, I started hearing that still, soft voice of the Lord. He was working on me, slowly and deliberately. To this day I don't know why, but He would not let me alone. I would get "urges" at all times of the day and night. I felt myself struggling to follow in the direction He was trying to lead me in, but I still had one foot firmly planted in "the world". And for some reason, it was at this time that I began reading the Bible and started questioning the correctness of my religious upbringing. The investigation of my "religion" began.

After much, much investigation, soul searching, agonizing, and pain, I decided that I must leave the church I had known. I had also started a relationship with a bunch of nuts who were nice enough to help me through the next couple of years of trials and tribulations -- The Wells Of Salvation Ministry folks!

I now knew that the Lord had something in store for me, and the only way to follow Him was to completely give up my former life and friends, and quite possibly family. I set a date of February 8th of that year, which also was the beginning of the Lenten season (sorry, it was the Catholic side of me). On that day I quit smoking, drinking and drugs cold turkey. It also began a two-night ordeal of burning everything that I owned that I felt was evil or would connect me with my past lifestyle. February 8th was the day that I recommitted my life to the Lord, Jesus Christ!!!

The details of my past sinful life have been, believe it or not:, quite brief. I have not even touched on some of the degrading and evil parts that were there. It has just been a synopsis of what happened. Believe me when I tell you, though, the only difference between me and anyone in the Dayton Correctional Institute is that they got caught and I didn't. The astounding thing to me is that the Lord was; always there for me, even through all that I did. He did not let me go, just as He promised He wouldn't. He constantly tried to pull me back, but could not force me to. He patiently waited until I was at a low point in my life and then lovingly allowed me back in the fold. All of my sins were forgiven; all of my sins had already been paid for. Praise The Lord!!!

But my turning away from my old self and becoming a new creature in Christ does not sum up my testimony. The true story of my testimony is what God has done with my life since that February 8th. The Lord had used me in SO many ways! I have had a few years of work with Wells of Salvation, been involved in pro-life ministries, and been able to help, counsel, and console others in their times of trouble. God has been good to me and allowed me to be used in so many, many ways. He has allowed me to serve Him, and that is really what I consider to be my testimony.

I thank all of those who helped me during my times of trial and tribulation. I pray that the Lord will allow me to continue serving Him in whatever way He sees fit! Amen.