

Personal Testimony of Rev. Rick Smith



I was raised in a Christian home and attended the Wesleyan church as a child. My family was in church every time the doors were open. I was involved in everything from Sunday School to VBS. At the age of 10, I responded to the call of God one Sunday morning when the Pastor gave an invitation. It was at that time I felt God calling me to a life of service to Him.

When I was 12 my family left the Wesleyan church and began attending the Church of the Nazarene. There, I was heavily involved with the church as a teenager. I sang in the teen choir, went to youth camp, and even preached a sermon during youth week.

Now you would think with such a foundation as this I would have had no problem entering into the ministry. But it was during my teen years that I began to experiment with drugs and alcohol. I had no idea at that time that I would spend the next 13 years addicted, in trouble with the law, arrested, jailed, and having a marriage that would end in divorce. I just wanted to fit in. I stopped going to church and I rebelled against everything that I was taught in Sunday school and Church. I ran with a new crowd that was into very sinful behavior. I lived for sex, drugs and alcohol. I got high and drank everyday. I lost all respect for myself as well as others. I had several car accidents as a result of being intoxicated. I overdosed several times. In all reality I should be dead today. I believe that if it wasn't for the prayers of my mother and father I never would have survived. Alcohol and drugs ruined my life, my marriage and my health.

Then one day in the summer of 1983 I was sitting in a bar in Trenton, NJ when I heard the voice of God saying, *"Go find a church and pray."* Somehow, some way, I obeyed that voice and left the bar and walked several blocks to a nearby church. I knocked on the door of the church and the Pastor opened the door. He only opened it a crack. He asked me what I wanted. I told him that "I had been running from God and now it was time to come home." I asked him if he would pray with me so that I could be saved. He told me that he was about to go into a church board meeting. I then asked him if one of his board members could pray with me. He said, "No" and slammed the door in my face. I sat down on the church steps and cried out to God. I said *"Lord why? I only want to be saved and your people turned*

their back on me.” How wrong of me to blame God. It was one of his “so called sheep” that turned me away.

Several days later I was talking to my mother on the phone. I told her what had happened. I told her about the voice of the Lord. I told her about the Pastor at that church. She said son, “*Come Home*”. I was 27 years old. I was a man but her words went straight to my heart.

The very next Sunday I went back to the Nazarene church that I had been so involved in as a teen. I was so ashamed of myself. I couldn’t look at anyone in the eye. I was under such heavy conviction that day. I knew that I was going to the altar to be saved whether the preacher gave an invitation or not. Finally at the end of the service the invitation was given. I shot down that aisle like nobody’s business. I begged Jesus to forgive me. As I prayed, I was surrounded by men and women. They were literally on their faces praying for my salvation. Many of them were people who were involved in my life as a teenager. It seems as if they too had been praying for me all those years. That day, the first Sunday of August 1983 my life was forever changed. I found out first hand what unconditional love was all about. Instantly I felt a love for all those people who were around me.

God changed my heart. He filled me with a peace that I had never known. I had come full circle. The prodigal son had returned and it felt so good. I knew that I had to repent and change my ways. I also knew that I had to make good on a promise that I made to God 17 yrs earlier in a little Wesleyan church. I had answer God’s call. Even after all that had happened, I knew. As I was obedient to Him he put people and resources in my path that would eventually help me enroll in and complete my training in Bible College. Then in fall of 1987 I, accepted the call to Pastor my first church.

As I look back now on the last 25 years I can see that God has given me first hand experience to relate to people who are down and out. I feel called to the alcoholic, drug addict, and those who have turned away from Him. Called from my sinful past to tell them that God loves them. I learned a valuable lesson from that Pastor who closed the door in my face. I learned that winning the lost is the most important thing any Pastor can attempt to do. My favorite verse in all the Bible is *Romans 5:8* “*But God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”. I believe with all my heart that God can save anyone who wants to be saved. He proved that the day he saved me.

* * * * *