

He Loves Me

Personal testimony
of Beth Johnston

I, Mary Elizabeth aka Beth, was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky. I have a younger brother and a younger sister. I was told that my father was Catholic. However he never, in my life time, went to mass or church nor did he ever talk about the Catholic Church. He never wanted anything to do with "church" or God. My mother attended a Christian Church. They were married for 24 years which ended in a separation and then in divorce. I'm sorry to say that attending church services was never a priority.

I was never real close to my mother. She was always comparing me to others and especially to my sister which always resulted in hurt. I tried so hard to please her but to no avail. I loved her anyway. I loved her enough to take her in our home and care for her the last eleven years of her life the best that I possibly could.

I always turned to my grandmother as the example and teaching me about God and music and just all the things a girl needed to know in life. We were very close even after she moved to Florida. I was able to move to Inverness and we got to spend a lot of time together (every day for almost one year) before she very suddenly died at the age of 62. Needless to say, I was very devastated by her passing.

I attended a Restoration Movement, Non-Denominational Christian Church. At the age of 14 years old I confessed publicly that I believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of the Living God and my Savior and was baptized by emersion for the remission of my sins.

From that time forward, I was very committed to the church, I attended very faithfully, I was a nursery worker, Sunday School teacher, youth sponsor, sang specials, sang in the choir, sang on the worship team, was a worship leader and was always willing to work with or in anything that had to do with the church.

I thought I was doing everything that God expected of me. However, I knew that I was never without sin. I would ask God to forgive me if I remembered. I prayed, I read "daily devotions" and read the Bible - when I remembered or had time to do SO.

Then the day came when I was told "your husband has a horrible disease and there is no cure or help". I started doubting. God seemed to be nowhere around me. Due to taking care of him I was not able to attend church for several months. I learned during that time that the church didn't even miss me. There were no visits, no phone calls, no one volunteering to help me, nothing.

Did I believe there truly was a God? and did I really love God? I was always told that there was a God and He was a loving God and always a forgiving God. So---I thought I believed, and I thought I was okay!

Being a caretaker for my mother and the last two years of my husband's life had really taken a toll on me. I found myself crying out to God "WHY"? First my grandmother, then my father, then my husband of 36 years and then my mother. What had I done that was so terribly wrong to deserve this? I started doubting the Bible. Was it really God's Word?

After a year of crying out to God, blaming God, being so angry with God and not understanding and totally confused, I found myself lying face down on the floor in my closet seeking Him. I knew then that

I really never believed 100% that God was real. I knew that my heart had never been open and given to Him totally. I was the lost sheep that had gone astray.

I asked God to forgive me for treating Him as an object and being so angry at Him. It was at that time that I felt His arms wrap around me. I heard Him say that he loved me and that I was forgiven. I felt so unworthy of His love and forgiveness. I kept telling Him how sorry I was and that I loved Him so much. However, I didn't have anyone to tell what had happened and I was not baptized again. I had not obeyed God. (I was always taught that a person is usually not baptized a second time unless you were new to that religion. Once you confessed that you believed and was baptized you were saved.)

I continued to go to church but was not satisfied. I didn't know what else to do or where else to go. I started digging deeper into His Word. I asked God every single day to lead me to someone or put me in the path of someone that loved Him as much as I did. After what seemed like forever, God led me to Harold. I had known Harold and Deanna for many years, and I knew that he had God. I was hesitant but excited when he asked if I would come with him to HOPE! As you get older change is very hard. However I had asked God to lead me and I had faith that He would not let me down. Harold said over and over again that I had nothing to be concerned about. That everyone would welcome me and love me, genuinely love me. He told me all about Brother Scott and Amy and their love for God and their concern for the lost All I can say is that Harold was I is right. Everyone did accept me and love me. He was right about Brother Scott and Amy. Their love for the lost is very evident.

I still felt unworthy of His love and forgiveness, but I have a very merciful God. I am so thankful for HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH!

For the first time in my life I began to hear the True Gospel from the preaching of Bro Scott and Bro. Charlie about what salvation really was and how only God could save me. The truth was getting clearer and clearer with every preaching. As I was listening to every word, God was speaking to me. In a sermon about the "lost sheep" God told me I was that one. I WAS LOST! But I wasn't totally ready to admit it just yet. I was still leaning on the fact that I had done so much to show my love to Him through works so how could I be lost.

Bro. Scott began preaching/teaching about Unity. I wanted to be a part of the Unity of Hope Baptist Church. However, as I listened to the preaching and after speaking with Bro. Scott, I learned that I would never have that Unity without God and salvation. The Unity that he was speaking about was Unity with God. I sure didn't like knowing that even though it was the truth!

I met with Bro. Scott and talked about this Unity with God. I told him that I was sure I was saved and that I loved God and that He was in my heart. He asked me to write my testimony. I was never asked to do that before. So I did and he met with me once again. We talked in length. It was at that time that I realized that I WAS LOST!

Then there was the question- "Do you love God? Do you really love God? Is He really in my heart?" I thought so. The more preaching I heard and the more songs that were sung the more it became difficult to worship. I was struggling. I wasn't worthy to worship God. I did not deserve His love. I was so guilty of the horrible way I had lived and the lies I had lived with and the way I treated God for over 50 some years that it just tore me up inside.

I went to God and poured my heart out asking for forgiveness once again. It hurt so bad to finally accept that He sacrificed His Son to save me. I told God I did not want to live that way any longer. He asked me if I was ready to move on towards Him. I cried out to Him, YES, GOD I AM.

It was at that time that God told me that there were a couple of things that I needed to work on. I thought getting to salvation would be much easier now. Oh but it wasn't. Every song that said anything about the crucifixion of His Son upon the cross and the blood that was shed because of me just broke my heart even more. Every preaching word about being lost and it was because I did not obey God and called him a liar just made my heart ache more. It was hard to control the tears of heart ache. It wasn't just on Sunday and Wednesday. I struggled every day! I would talk to Harold about the preaching and my struggles and each time he would listen and smile and then he would say "God Loves You, Beth"!

Then one day God said "patience"! You must have patience. What? I couldn't believe He was telling me that. Patience was one of the virtues that I had so much difficulty with all my life. Oh yes, God had been working on "taming" my patience and over the years there was improvement. However, I still wanted to do everything- my way and it had to be done NOW!

From one of the meetings with Bro. Greg and Bro. Terry came the words BE STILL! Okay, but how? I wanted salvation. _I wanted to do whatever it took to gain that salvation. BE STILL - but - do not stop searching and running to find Him. Listen to what God has to say.

There was preaching about the pathway that led to God. There is a wide path and there is a narrow path. The narrow path was the one that would take me to Him. Matthew 7:13, 14 "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. " I heard run towards the Light which was at the end of the narrow path. I ran even harder. I kept running towards that Light but always fell short of reaching it. I struggled even more and kept asking God "What am I doing wrong?" "What do I need to do differently." God told ME to stop trying to get salvation. He said that He would do that and that He was the only one to give me salvation. Quit getting in the way! PATIENCE!!!

Then in May 2021 came the Birthday Celebration at Lighthouse! WOW! Love was overflowing. The worship was something I had never seen or heard or been a part of before. Not to say that the worship was less at Hope. No – just more people loving God and giving God all the praise! I just took it all in - the music, the preaching and the love. However, the struggle became even harder! I was trying very hard to be patient and waiting on God. Each night after talking about the services Harold would say "God Loves You Beth".

CAMP! Worship- Preaching- Loving One Another! Words cannot describe it. And it wasn't just Love. It was genuine love! On Tuesday, June 22, 2021: The words from a song- "No One Ever Cared For Me Like Jesus!" That hit me hard. He cared for me! God Loves You Beth!

Then Bro. Mike preached from Isaiah 53. He spoke about Christ. Isaiah 53:2 "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground. ... " But he emphasized-- a very tiny seed from vs 10. "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of

the LORD shall prosper in his hand.” At this point I didn't hear anymore preaching. I only heard God say, "You, Beth, are that seed. I planted and watered and nurtured you along." He told me that He wanted that seed. My response was "here I am God! I am yours"! Immediately I felt peace come over me and I was full of joy! I was no longer struggling or running. All I could do was praise Him and thank Him. I was giving Him all the glory!

I had the hardest time sitting and waiting for Bro. Terry to dismiss us. I couldn't wait to talk to Bro. Scott and to tell him that I ran towards the Light and God accepted me with full salvation. God is a very Loving, Kind, Gracious and Merciful God! He Loves Me!!