

He Just Wanted Me

Personal testimony
of Scott Smith

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From my earliest memories, my family has been in church. I don't think I realized how much I actually learned as a child until much later in my life. I made my first profession of faith by the time I was 7 or 8, largely in part because I had seen other kids do it who were a little older. I remember my dad trying to see if I was ready, but I was determined. I remember praying "the prayer", repeating the words of the youth pastor while looking around to see who was watching. I was baptized and it was done.

The youth in this church had an annual mission trip to an Indian reservation in Arizona. I couldn't wait to turn 14 so that I could go. Our focus was to do vacation bible school classes during the day and then have children's church and worship for the adults at night. In preparing for the trip, I started studying the Bible on my own. It was ingrained in me that I would be held accountable for everything I said in front of the children so I was serious about what I taught, what I knew, how I conducted myself. I went to Arizona every year through high school. While at home, I began teaching Sunday school classes, leading children's church and even "preached" a few times during the parent's night at vacation bible school. It was after one of those times that the idea was introduced to me that I was probably supposed to be a preacher. I loved teaching. It fit me like nothing else I'd ever done. Yet somehow, that moment framed who I was in my mind and I took it as truth. I spent the next 10+ years of my life wrestling with that and rebelling against it.

As a teenager, I had all the "normal" teenage stuff, compounded by a rough relationship with my father, uncontrollable insecurity, and the weight of being a preacher hanging over my head. All that and more resulted in me being a huge hypocrite. I struggled with my salvation many times only to be reassured that everything was fine, all teenagers struggle with things, you'll be fine. On one hand, no one would listen. On the other, I would never be 100% honest with anyone, including myself. I was determined not to break the veneer of righteousness I was portraying. All the while, my sin and guilt was eating me alive from the inside. I found myself hanging out in our church cemetery and thinking about death a lot. There was a room full of voices in my head accusing and condemning me all the time. I became very depressed, but I had to keep up the front. During this time, often in my darkest moments, God would reach down and talk to me through my darkness. He gave me promises from scripture, spared my life, and never let me go too far. Even though I felt the pull of my sin and all my corruptness bearing down on me, somehow there was still something inside that really did want to know God.

I was always taught that salvation was by faith through grace, that it was a gift of God and not of works. However, practically speaking, "getting saved" meant repeating a prayer which included confessing those things we believed, admitting our guilt for sins, and asking Jesus to be our Lord and Savior and to come into our hearts. Salvation and assurance ultimately depended on how much you believed and how sincere you were. If you really meant it, God could not lie, you had to be saved. Over and over I went through this cycle of trying hard, falling down, rededicating, praying for forgiveness, confessing, rehearsing again and again. I can't tell you how many times I must have prayed some version of the "sinner's prayer" hoping that at some point it would take. How do you ever know if you mean it enough? If the Bible says that man's heart is "deceitfully above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it" (Jeremiah 17:9), how could I ever know I was really sorry enough, that I even wanted him? At those times, I could feel myself trying to convince myself as much as God that I was really repentant and wanted him more than anything.

This really continued until I was about 20. I remember sitting in our youth director's apartment discussing the static spiritual condition of some friends. Each topic brought a sharp accusation to my heart. They were never changed, they never seemed to grow any with the Lord, and year after year they were in the same place. The "they" somewhere turned on me and I began to get furious. The more they talked, the angrier I got until I exploded. Without even thinking, I began to tell them all the reasons I was the way I was, why I was stuck. It was like vomiting all my excuses at once as I presented my defense. Hate and anger from years and years that I had suppressed came pouring out of my mouth almost uncontrollably. This was it. I had totally blown my cover. I left there in sheer panic and my mind was reeling. It actually felt like I was unraveling. Someone had pulled on the little loose end I had left untucked and the whole fabric was coming undone. After running through several options, I decided I would go to the hospital and ask to talk to someone. If they didn't take me seriously, I was determined I'd do something to myself to get their attention. As I turned the corner leading into the entrance, something inside told me to go talk to someone who had been at the meeting that night. I turned the car around and headed back to the apartment. I arrived about 2 am to find out that they had been praying for me since I left. All I could do was pour my guts out. I didn't hold back anything, I didn't sugar coat it. I could barely believe the words were coming out my mouth but I was too tired to be as careful or guarded as usual. I said something like "there is no way I can be saved". The response was "you know what to do". I immediately got down on the concrete. There were no rehearsed words, no repeating after me, just me pouring my heart out to God this time not caring what anyone else heard. I summed up my confession with "God, if you still want me, you can have me".

At that point, everything stopped - the emotions, the desperation, the fear, everything. I told my friend that I really didn't feel anything. It felt like the static on the TV after they've shut down programming for the day. "Nothing" was wonderful compared to all the turmoil my heart had been in. I know now that God was simply finished for the evening. He had accomplished exactly what he intended to for now. Something had happened, I called it salvation. I took my new testimony to church with me armed to the teeth. There were many there who didn't understand, but I wouldn't back down. After all, they didn't know the real me, only the me I let them see.

After that, I was pretty much finished with all the religious activity I had been so involved in. The facade was broken so I guess I didn't feel the need to pile up quite so much stuff to balance the scales. Reluctantly I started having discipleship meetings with the guy who had prayed with me that night. At first, we were going to meet and just pray about stuff that was going on, whatever came up. But from the first time we met, little things began to pop up in general conversation that God would point out. For instance, if I got overly upset about something small we started asking why? For the first time, my excuses didn't really work, the "why" was related to sin, not circumstances. I was sold on that. Root by root, rock by rock, God began to pull things out of my heart. Over the course of several months I confessed grudges and unforgiveness, envies, bitterness, jealousy, all manner of sin that was pinned up in my heart. Finally we just reached a point where we didn't have anything to talk about or drudge up. I did feel much better being so totally open and laid bare before God and a good friend. Then, out of no where, the preaching dilemma came back. What would I do for God after he'd been so good to me? The most completely sacrificial thing I could think of would be full time ministry. God did not call for it; I certainly did not want to do it. But I was thankful and I understood duty, especially religious duty that had nothing to do with how you felt. So I surrendered to preach (for about the 3rd time) and went off to bible college.

Without going into a lot of detail, several things in my life fell apart during the first several months in college. It was like the perfect storm. Once again I fell into a depression. The torment, the voices, the condemnation were all back with a vengeance. The strongman had come back to find the house swept and clean and I was worse off than before. It cost me my grades, my friends, my church, my plans, my reputation. I was so angry at everyone around me that I found plenty of people to blame including God. I was trying so hard, how could this happen? The suicide thoughts came back, this time with blueprints for how and when. I was taking sleeping pills so that I could sleep during the day and avoided everyone I knew. Two of the guys in my dorm basically took turns making sure I got up and ate. On the one hand, this was one of the darkest times in my life. On the other, I had never felt God so close to me. He had allowed my own deception to knock the religious wind out of me and there was no one that could help.

At this point, I completely dropped out of church. I would sometimes go and glare holes through the preacher just to make sure he knew I was still there and that he still couldn't help me... solely out of meanness. Eventually, I stayed away for around 3 years. I took a second job and worked Sundays to stay busy. I can't tell you how many times I would pass random churches and consider walking in and telling my story to some pastor who didn't know me, that would maybe listen and be able to help. I just never had the guts or faith that it would work. For the last 6 months of that period I completely let my heart go. I won't go into specifics, but basically anything and everything I said I'd never do I tried. The fear of being caught and losing my religious reputation was long gone so there was really nothing to keep my sin in check. I would even go so far as to say that it was intentional. I remember thinking that I would fix it so that God could never use me again. Somewhere I had it in my mind that God only wanted to use me up, waste my life, and really didn't care for me or how I was doing. I really don't like to remember all the things I was thinking or why I did what I did. It is amazing to me that I lived through such rebellion and outright willful sin.

I was so deceived, not one time did I doubt or question my salvation. I had heard of people "backslidding" my whole life so that must be what I was doing. I would tell myself "God understands, he knows I'm angry and why I'm angry. He's just giving me my space." In fact I had the idea that if my sin separated me from God, I'd just multiply that sin to keep God at arm's length. Like my sin was cryptonite to God or the Spirit. I was so blind and ignorant. Thank you God that not even my sin could keep you from me! During this time of rebellion I was aware of God in and around my life. I had dreams warning me to stay away from certain people. I could tell he was protecting me and not letting me go as far as I would have on my own. One night in particular I was sitting on the back of my car smoking and saw a shooting star. I asked God, "If you still have a plan for me I want to see two more of those before I finish this cigarette". The words had barely passed through my mind and there they were! You would think that it would have scared me for God to be so close or caused me to feel sorry or something. But my heart hardened a little more as I was relieved to know I had not gone too far just yet. I DO NOT share these things in any way to glorify my sin. I am ashamed to this day of what I did, what I was thinking, how I turned my back on God. I do want to demonstrate how deceived I was. The entire time I thought I was saved because I had an experience at 20 in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. I had not become a new creature, old things had not passed away (2 Corinthians 5:17). I did not have peace or joy or hope (John 14:27, Romans 14:17). I did not love or anyone else but myself (1 John 4:7-8, Luke 9:23, 9:62, 14:26). This period of outright rebellion lasted about six months.

Finally, one night in January of 1996 I was on the way home. I remember feeling so alone and empty and craving love. I don't remember if I said it out loud through the tears or just hollered it in my head. I told the Lord "I just want someone to love me for me, not what I can do for them, just love me for me". Either way God heard me. It was like he was sitting in the car with me. I distinctly heard him ask "do you remember what it was like when you gave me your heart the first time?" "Yes". "Then give it back to me". At that time, the most wonderful experience I had ever had with God was the night outside the youth director's apartment. I had made a vow to God that if he still wanted me, he could have me. I knew my life was better when he had my attention, even with all the mess, than it was out in sin having my own way. I had found out the hard way what was in my heart and that I could not be trusted. I told him I didn't know who I was anymore. Immediately, he gave me hope that I was more than what I had become. That night he turned the prodigal toward home. I spit out the husks, and began the long walk back to the Father's house. In my mind, there were a set of shackles waiting on me that I had seen in a dream. But the "famine" was so intense, that I willfully desired the chains to my new so called freedom (Luke 15:11-24).

A few weeks later, I visited the church where I met my wife. She was the purest thing I had ever seen. My immediate response was "God would never trust me with something that pure, I'll mess it up". From that first night, God began to knit our hearts together and he taught me so much about love, grace, and second chances. We were married the next April and soon began our family.

In the winter of 1998 after the birth of our first son, we began to look for something else. The master plan was to escape the dreaded Y2K apocalypse by starting over in Dixon, Tennessee with Amy's parents. We even found a church in the area that seemed like what we were looking for. In the meantime, we were stuck. We even looked through the phone book. Lighthouse Baptist Church was right down the hill from Amy's parent's house and my brother-in-law was friends with many of the young people and kids there so we visited.

I had long sworn off going to another dead Baptist church but Lighthouse wasn't what I thought it would be. Bro Greg Moffitt was probably the most passionate preacher I had ever seen and by far the loudest. There weren't any worship bands, no guitars, no drums, no new fangled worship songs. The hymns were old and seemed to have a million verses. It just wasn't what we were used to. I wish I could say I immediately fell in love with things but that isn't what happened. Despite all that, there was something we couldn't get away from. The people really did seem to love each other and the worship was so sincere and meaningful. Something had happened to these people that caused them to be sincerely thankful for the God's forgiveness. I couldn't get away from how the men loved God. It didn't matter where we were, they were the same. Someone could mention something about grace or mercy or God saving them and off they'd go. I knew they had something I wanted, something real. I just didn't see that I didn't have it yet.

Amy was the first of our clan to realize she was lost. Despite all her "good girlness", God showed her that she had never repented of her sin. Not just what she had done, but over who she was. I watched God convince her, talk to her, and eventually save her. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe the difference. It wasn't that she stopped smoking or drinking or cussing. It was that she had never really loved God or loved people and somehow it just seemed to come out of her when she wasn't trying.

There were hints all during this time that I was lost, but I dismissed them. I started hearing things for the first time that explained so much about my life. The parable of the sower explained why I was never able to stick with it. Why I would receive the Word with joy and then wither. I never had a root. I was shown for the first time how God dealt with lost people in the Bible. Turns out he talked to them, did miracles in their lives, heard their prayers, on and on. Most of these things were crutches that I leaned on for assurance that I was saved. I saw that I only did things for God when pressured or asked, never out of love or gratitude. All the evidence was mounting and it made that 20 year old experience look pretty weak, especially in light of my life afterwards. But what about God saying “you gave me your life, give it back to me again”. That was a classic Baptist rededication if I ever heard one. And I didn’t doubt it was God so he had essentially acknowledged that I had given him my life. That was my vow “if you want me you can have me”. Then I heard about Jesus’s response to the crowd in John 2. There it says that many believed on his name but he did not commit himself to them because he knew the hearts of all men. That explained how I could dedicate and rededicate my life over and over and never feel like it was accepted by God. The question I was always asked was “when did you give your life to Christ”? The question I had to answer was “when did Christ commit himself to me”?

Finally, God got my attention in May 1999. We had missed church Memorial Day weekend to go to a family reunion and I had gotten the tape. That Tuesday I listened to Bro Greg preach from Hosea 5 over and over again. The verse that kept coming back to me was 5:15 “I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.” The gist of the sermon was that God was going to his place to see if the people would “frame their doings to turn unto their God” (vs 4). I thought I was going crazy. One minute I thought God had left and wasn’t coming back, the next I convinced myself I was fine, everything was ok. It didn’t stop until I told Bro Greg that I had to talk to him that Wednesday night. We setup a time for Friday night to get together for some ice cream and to talk.

Friday night, while the ladies were making ice cream, I was still trying to calm myself down. Amy and Mrs. Janet, our pastor’s wife, were talking about being saved in the kitchen while I listened. They were discussing how hard loving people was before they were saved. A thought shot through me “everything is hard for you”. I went outside to hide that I was crying. I asked Amy if she would be upset if I thought I was lost by the time we left. She sorta’ smiled and said “nope”. At some point the conversation began with Bro Greg. I don’t know what all he knew before we started talking, but he never talked to me like I was lost. All he would say is “Scott, as long as I’ve known you you’ve chopped on fruits, we have to get down to the root of the problem.” He pointed out a shrub in the yard and told me that he had cut it off at the ground more than once and it had always come back because he didn’t dig up the root. A little later we took the conversation inside and I poured my life out before Bro Greg. He told me two things. First, I would never have to tell that story again. I had waited years and years for this moment. I had finally found my help. Second he said that according to scripture there is no way I was saved but that God would have to convince me. I was so relieved to know that what I had called salvation was not all there was. There was something more, something my heart yearned for and though God had spoken to me, though he’d guarded my life and protected me, though I’d had countless emotional experiences and at times seen my life change in some ways, I had never been truly born again.

I don’t think I made a big public announcement that I was lost. Somehow it’s like everyone just knew. The very next Sunday God gave me my first promise.

Hebrews 6:4-10 “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

Then in verse 12 he says “That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” He warned me then and there that I needed to be everywhere the men were all the time. Whether it was working, or praying, whatever to just follow them. God knew exactly what he was doing and he gave me the grace to not only believe his word but to be a doer. From that time on he also cleared my mind so that I could listen and understand what I was hearing. The condemning voices that had plagued me since my teenage years were quieted and my mind didn’t race in a hundred directions. Over the next several weeks as preaching went on, God gave me another promise.

Psalms 107:10-16 “Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High: Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he has broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.”

I knew if I cried out to him in my distress he’d deliver me. However, I didn’t focus on the “he saved them”. I focused on the “they cried unto the Lord”. Sermon after sermon I would listen, feel God stirring, then I’d go to crying out trying to find the perfect combination to get God’s attention. I finally found myself at the altar in the middle of Bro Greg preaching. I don’t know if I was being too loud or if it was obvious I was completely off track but Bro Greg stopped the service to come help me. I told him that I felt like God was there but he had his back to me and if I just said the right thing or said it the right way he’d turn around and save me. I will never forget the look on Bro Greg’s face when he said “God has never turned his back on you, you have turned your back on him”. All this time I actually thought that I was trying and that I was waiting on God. The truth was he had been the one doing everything and he was waiting on me.

That June, our entire family went camping in Eureka Springs AR. All of us were lost except Amy so it was on everyone’s minds. Later that week would be our first time to go the Festival of Joy at Grace Baptist in Pontotoc, Mississippi. That Sunday morning we went to Thorn Crown Chapel in Eureka Springs. I didn’t expect anything to come from a tourist stop church. As soon as the preacher got up to start I felt my neck stiffen, I didn’t know him from anybody, didn’t know if he was saved, on and on. But he started out making the case that God is near everyone of us (Acts 17:27). I couldn’t argue with

that. Then he began to explain why people couldn't see him near them. He went to Romans explaining that it was because they went about to establish their own righteousness and would not submit themselves to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). He gave the examples of the Pharisees who had waited for the Messiah for so long, but since they were self righteous, they couldn't see him standing right in front of them. I left thinking "well that wasn't as bad as I thought it would be" but nothing really sank in. Two days later I was alone in the laundromat at the campground reading the first book of the Left Behind series. I was at the beginning of the book where the rapture has taken place and those left behind are scrambling to figure out what happened. One of the main characters, an airplane pilot, knew where they had gone. His wife and son were gone and he knew exactly why. I started imagining how I would feel if Amy and our son had been raptured and I was left. I followed the man's story until he opened the Bible to Revelation and began reading about coming and buying with no money. Somehow, the goodness of God broke on my heart in this... Christ had not come back before he told me I was lost (Romans 2:4). He could have come for Amy and Ethan at any time and left me in my deception. But because he had brought me so far I believed he would finish the work. It made me so thankful. Somehow in the middle of that, God reminded me of the sermon about the Pharisees. He showed me plain as day that it was me. It surprised me because I had always identified with the harlot. I had the scars and war stories to prove it. Turns out, I was just a really bad Pharisee. He convinced me that I would have been one of the ones to cry Hosanna, Hosanna when he rode into Jerusalem, but when he didn't do what I wanted him to I'd cry crucify him crucify him. It absolutely broke my heart and changed my mind about who I was. He didn't need to bring up all my horrible sins for me to repent over. I had already repented again and again over what I had done. But I'd never seen how proud I was of my religious works and what I thought I knew. I had never seen that I was guilty of Christ's death, that I would have actually been responsible. I left the laundromat with a lot of hope for what might happen at camp that weekend.

By this time I had heard many sermons about God's ways and that salvation involved repentance and faith. Somehow I had it in my mind that I had repented in the laundromat and now I was going to get faith taken care of at the Festival. Despite the hope I was sensing, I have never felt so out of place in my life. I felt like I was surrounded by people who had truly been born again and that somehow I was marked. There was a reproach to bear with lostness that I wasn't familiar with. It didn't make me want to run or deny anything. I was just keenly aware that I was separated from these people somehow. But, that never kept them from loving me. We stayed in the home of Mark and Diana Fuqua whom we had never met. From the moment we entered their home, we were treated like old friends. I couldn't get over how gracious they were and how much they genuinely seemed to be interested in our lives and who we were. There was a lot of good preaching that weekend too. I particularly remember a sermon about the grace of God by Bro Greg. I felt God was there the whole time he was preaching. I knew it was for me and that God was telling me why I could come. I knew if I cried out God would save me and this time I tried the floor. I remember getting down, almost under my chair, and crying and struggling but my unbelief was so strong. Later that night Bro Charles Shipman preached about Paul healing the man on the island of Melita after his shipwreck. I told God during the sermon that if I could see a miracle like that I would be able to believe. Shortly after the sermon, Bro Terry Owen felt like he needed to end the meeting and dismissed somewhat abruptly. Just then the lady in the seat in front of me jumped up and said "No, we can't leave yet, I need to be saved". She was from our church and lost as well. I had to swallow hard to keep from shouting "yeah me too" right behind her. Within a second I heard her whisper something and then immediately she went from crying to shouting "he did it". I looked up to see her running down the aisle to our pastor. I

almost went numb. It felt like someone let all the air out of my balloon. Not too much later we were in the car on the way home. I couldn't really understand what I was feeling. It wasn't gratitude, or hope, or even fear. It was anger. She had beat me to my promise and called out to God. I had been trying so hard that week to seek the Lord and listen and respond. I had struggled and cried. I was so sure I would get saved that weekend and now here I was driving home, late at night, as lost as I was when I got there. Very gently God reminded me, "didn't you ask me to see a miracle". "You said you'd believe if you could see a miracle. I saved her right in front of you and you still didn't believe me." I couldn't argue with that. God convinced me that if I was angry because of something God did or didn't do it meant that I thought I deserved better. Like I had earned something with all my effort and crying and repenting.

Luke 7:31-32 "And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept."

That was me. I may as well have been saying "God don't you see how hard I'm trying, how much I've been seeking and praying, and asking. Why won't you save me?" If you would have told me I was working for my salvation I'm not sure I would have seen it. However, I had dug a nice rut that I seemed to fall into every time God would pull up close. The promise was that God delivered them out of all their distresses when they cried out. So I had two things in mind – one, I had to be "in distress" when I got saved and two, I had to cry out for him to do anything.

By this time I was working for a Christian non-profit ministry. I had told my boss the week before that I was lost and that I wanted something real. He mentioned praying the prayer and I told him I had already tried that umpteen times and nothing had ever changed. For all the things I claimed to believe about God, I had never fully trusted him with my heart. I likened it to wanting to run off the diving board and just jump in. But I found myself time after time running up to the edge and stopping just short. Romans calls this staggering at the promise through unbelief (Romans 4:19-22). We had staff meetings every Monday morning just to get updates and see how everyone was doing. Usually someone would do a devotional. For some reason, when it was my turn to share, I just started telling everyone how I was struggling. One by one the other ministers and staff began to shake their heads - they felt the same way. Until they realized I was saying I was lost. Struggling was one thing, being lost, unsaved, an unbeliever was something else.

By this time my head had become a war zone again. From Friday to the next Wednesday it was like I had returned to square one. I went out on the vacant church property before church that night to pray. I don't know exactly what I was trying to do but something compelled me to try to prove to God how desperate I was. I needed to show him I was at the end of myself and couldn't go on. I tried crying out loud, whispering, and on my face in the dirt (literally so that it would really count). I even found a pile of timber and marched around it trying to get God's attention. Needless to say the heavens were brass. God wasn't the least bit impressed with my show or my words no matter how sincere I was. I went to church that night and felt and heard nothing. Amy could sense the hopelessness setting in and urged me to call Bro Greg that night. I made some excuses and decided to meet him out at the land the next morning during his daily run.

The next morning I arrived at the land ahead of Bro Greg. I sat down and began to pray only to find myself surrounded. The voices were back and louder than ever. I heard “you realize you are just out here working for it again” and “what do you think you are doing”. The louder they got, the more desperate I was to talk to Bro Greg. I got up and started walking towards his house. As soon as I got up God reminded me that he’d already defeated the devil, he had crushed his head. The voices subsided and gave way to hope. I began to think about things like “this would have been a beautiful day to get saved”. Bro Greg and I missed each other by the time I made it to his house but I eventually caught up with him. I told him I couldn’t go on like this anymore and how badly I needed God. We went a little further up onto the church land and sat down. Immediately I felt God’s presence. I don’t remember what Bro Greg was doing, although I’m sure he was praying. I began going through what had become almost ceremony when God approached. I knew I had to call out, I knew he would save me from my distress – so I began to rehearse all the reasons why he shouldn’t save me. “I know I can’t do this on my own. I know nothing I can do is good enough. I know I’m guilty of your death.” On and on with all I knew and had been shown. Just as I began to recite the list of all my sin, everything shut down; my crying, everything. Seemingly God’s presence was gone, just like so many times before. I sat up and explained to Bro Greg what was happening and how I always seem to hit a wall. He sat back for a moment like a doctor contemplating the results of a CAT scan or something, then rendered my diagnosis. “Scott, I don’t think you believe God wants to save you.” I don’t know if you’ve ever experienced this or not, but it’s like you just know something is true because it shoots all the way through you. There aren’t any holes in it or arguments, it’s just true. My heart agreed with the truth that when it was all said and done, with all that I was, I didn’t believe that God wanted to save me.

I didn’t know that the night before, after Bro Greg went home from Wednesday night services, God began to speak to him and give him another sermon. It was just for me. He began to tell me the story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph wanted to reveal himself so much that he had to leave the room to keep from doing it too soon. His heart longed for them to know he was alive and he’d forgiven them, but timing was crucial. The bottom line was there was a reason Joseph had to wait and it was not because he didn’t want to. He was up to something. My heart grabbed onto that with both hands. I could almost see God having to back away from me, about to bust, because something wasn’t done. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to save me, there was something he was waiting for, he was up to something. We left and I went on to work consumed all day with one thought... “what was Joseph waiting for?”.

That night was men’s prayer meeting. I had so much hope leaving the house. Before that night, I somehow felt like hope was getting in the way of the distress I had to feel to cry out. Like I was being prideful or presumptuous if I was hopeful. But faith is the substance of things hoped for (Hebrews 11:1). All that time I was throwing away the raw materials of the faith God intended to give me and traded it for what I thought God wanted – despair and desperation. That night everything was different. As we went around sharing prayer requests I asked the men to pray that God would give me grace to continue to seek him. I told them that I knew it wasn’t that God didn’t want to save me but something wasn’t finished and I needed grace to be what and where I should be until it was done. I took my bible with me to the altar. As the other men prayed and tried to find God, I started reading the story of Joseph out of Genesis 39-45. I read about how his brothers didn’t believe him, how they were jealous and hated him. How they were going to kill him and then relented into selling him into slavery. How they lied to their father and hid their sin for years. Meanwhile, Joseph was faithful, locked in prison, forgotten then exalted to governor, and he saved Egypt from famine. When the

famine grew larger it hit Jacob and the brothers and they came to Egypt for food. When they arrived they were faced with a very different Joseph than the one they tried to kill. But they didn't know who he was even though Joseph recognized them immediately. They ate and drank with him, still he waited. They made deals with him, left one of the brothers as collateral, on and on but still Joseph never let on who he was. Finally he works it out so that they have to go and get Benjamin. The brothers knew this was it. After the loss of Joseph, Benjamin was the father's favorite, the youngest and the dearest thing to his heart. They were out of arguments, no more conniving, no more deceit and no making deals. They were completely at Joseph's mercy. Chapter 45 begins "Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren." The other men were praying but I don't remember what anyone said until Bro Joe prayed. All I remember is him saying "Lord help my little brother Scott". I may have struggled believing God would hear me, but I knew God heard Bro Joe. I'm not sure where I was in reading the story when he prayed but I remember almost physically looking around and thinking "here comes some grace". I don't know how hope turns into faith, or how a person is fully persuaded to saving faith. I just know that all this time it felt like God was literally pouring faith into me like filling a glass with water.

As I read on it says in vs. 4 "And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near." I could feel my heart leap toward God. There was no condemnation, no rehearsing all the reasons he shouldn't save me, I just went to him without leaving that spot at the altar. "And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt". He knew who I was I didn't have to tell him. He knew I was guilty and before I could dwell on that he said "No therefore, be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. (vs7) And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God." My mind shot to the cross and how it truly was God that had sent Christ to die for me. Somehow, even though his blood was on my hands, it was really God who sent him to deliver me... because he loved me. He loved me. That thought pounded in my heart. It was like watching a movie of my life and seeing all the little flashes of when God had intervened, told me he loved me, saved my life from myself. He had been my Bright and Morning star when I was a child and had to catch the school bus in the dark. He'd been there when I was a teenager and thought my life wasn't worth living. He'd fought off the death that tracked me down and gave me promises that held me together. Even in my most sinful times, he had been there not letting me go. He'd welcomed the prodigal home with so much love I couldn't believe it. And after a life of bouncing between the Pharisee and the harlot, he had brought me to the truth. All that flashed by in a moment and all my heart could say is "you love me, you really do love me". At some point in all this Bro Greg began to pray "God I know you are here, but I don't know where you are". I raised my hand and whimpered "he's over here". He began to pray that God, by the Holy Spirit, would bring me home. He knew he could come over and try to help me but he wanted the Holy Spirit to drive the chariot home. In my mind I could see myself, lame and twisted like Mephibasheth on the back of the chariot with Christ driving me home to the King's house. Then he prayed that he knew there would be a great battle for me and asked God to defeat my enemies. I couldn't literally see him, but in my heart and mind it was like Jesus was standing in front of me with his sword drawn and all the darkness around me just backed up. For the first time I knew he wasn't there with a sword for me. All this happened so fast but the reality set in that what Joseph was waiting on was Benjamin and what Christ had been waiting on was me! He just wanted me, no deals, no bartering, just me and he had spent my life proving that he wanted me. I jumped up and ran over to Bro Greg telling him "I know what Joseph was waiting on.

He just wanted me. This whole time he's just wanted me!" I went back to my spot and cried and laughed over the simplicity of just believing that he wanted me even with all my sin, all my hypocrisy, all my dead works, all my rebellion. He had gone ahead of me to provide a great deliverance just so he could have me.

I wish there was a special, consecrated language used to describe true salvation. Something different from the religious words we use that seem so cliché and commonplace. All I know to say is that the scripture is true, 2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." That really happens. He really can restore the years that the locusts have eaten. He heals the broken hearted and he sets the captive free. The words may be the same but there is a world of difference between just knowing the facts in your head and coming face to face with Christ through faith. July 22, 1999 was the beginning of days for me. My worship, my praise, my love for God were all ignited and are today kindled by that one moment so many years ago. I am so thankful to God for working repentance and faith into the stubborn religious heart of a wayward Pharisee.

Scripture References

2Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

1John 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

Luke 9:23 And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.

Luke 14:26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Luke 9:62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

Luke 15:11-24 And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Romans 2:4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

Romans 4:19-22 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

For more information, please contact

Lighthouse Baptist Church
11792 Douglas Street
Arlington, TN 38002
(901) 867-2009

www.lighthousebaptistarlington.org