

My Personal Testimony

by Denny Kenaston

Denny Kenaston's testimony recounts his journey from atheism to faith in Christ, highlighting the transformative power of God's mercy and the importance of seeking truth.

Duration: 49:39

Scripture: Psalm 40:1-3, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Personal Testimony"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his personal testimony of how God transformed his life. He emphasizes that God works in mysterious ways and leads us on a divine path. The speaker also highlights the importance of trusting in God and waiting patiently for His guidance. He references Psalm 40, which speaks of being lifted out of a pit and having a new song of praise in one's mouth. The speaker concludes by encouraging listeners to trust in God's plan and seek His blessings.

Transcript

Hello, this is Brother Denny. Welcome to Charity Ministries. Our desire is that your life would be blessed and changed by this message.

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These messages are offered to all without charge by the freewill offerings of God's people. A special thank you to all who support this ministry. Well, I'd rather be a Christian than anything else in the world.

You could be the President of the United States if you want. That would be a step down from being a child of God. I'd rather be a Christian than anything else in the world today.

Greet each one in the name of the Lord Jesus. I think it's right for us just to fall upon our knees and commit the service into His hands. I don't want to commit the service into His hands.

Let's all commit the service into His hands together as we pray. Father, we come to You in the name of Jesus this morning, Lord. We just thank You, God, for all Your goodness to us, Lord.

We thank You for the shed blood of Christ this morning. We thank You for Jesus. We thank You, Lord, that He's there in that exalted place on high this morning.

His name is above every name. We thank You for this, Lord. We thank You, God, this morning that everything can be well with our soul through the blood of Jesus.

Thank You for sprinkling our heart again this morning, Lord, with the precious blood of Jesus, making it clean, making it pure, making it white, whiter than snow. Lord, we thank You for that this morning. It's well with our souls, Lord.

Oh, the bliss of that glorious thought. My sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. Father, we just ask You this morning to meet with us. We are not here to hear words.

We didn't come here to sing, Lord. We came here to meet with You. I just pray, Lord, come on down.

Come minister to Your people again this morning, Lord. Set the fires burning in each one of our hearts. God, make us what Jesus wants us to be, each and every one of us.

Oh, God, we just want to commit this service into Your hands. Every person, every child, every visitor. Oh, God, just let a hush come over all of us here this morning.

We just commit the service into Your hands, Lord, asking You to bind the powers of the devil and every evil spirit that would hinder this meeting this morning, Lord. We trust You to do that in the name of Jesus. We ask You to bless this meeting in the name of Jesus with thanksgiving.

Amen. Well, we want to welcome all the visitors that are with us this morning. We may not be able to get around to every one of you, but we're very grateful that you're here today.

I trust that God will bless you, minister to you through something that is said or something that was sung or a prayer that was prayed. I trust that God will minister to you. We just believe with all of our heart.

God makes no mistakes and He led you here. And He led you here for a blessing. And that's our prayer also, that God would bless you.

I'd like you to turn in your Bibles this morning for an opening to Psalm 40. I feel led this morning by the Lord to just to give my personal testimony. I don't know if I've ever done that around here.

I know that I share different pieces of it here and there. But I just felt led of the Lord this morning to give my personal testimony. How the Lord works in somebody's life.

Psalm 40 says, I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.

Many shall see it and fear and shall trust in the Lord. I would have to say this morning, as I pondered the possibility of giving my testimony, these verses came clear to my heart over and over again. Maybe you feel the same way.

I think it's good if everybody feels like that. That God had mercy upon them and lifted them up out of a pit and out of the miry clay, and set their feet on a rock and established their going. But I know this morning that that is exactly what the Lord did for me.

He put me on a rock. He established my going. He gave me direction in life that I desperately needed.

And I've never been the same for it since. As I look back in my life, it's now almost 18 years. It will be 18 years, I think, in February, that I became a Christian.

And I look back on my life and remember that as I was growing up, I didn't have any religious training. There was no Bible in our house. Nobody ever opened up the Bible.

Nobody ever took us to church. No one ever spoke about God in our house. If anything, it was kind of laughed about.

It was kind of a joke. Anybody who was a real Christian, well, we sort of called them holy rollers at our house. We didn't know what that meant.

We had no idea what it meant. But we heard it somewhere as somebody else was mocking God and God's people. So we picked it up around our house.

No religious background. When I became a teenager and it came time for me to choose, just like it comes time for every teenager to choose what they're going to do, what they're going to think, what's going to direct their life, I made my choice based on what I had learned. And I decided there was no God.

I decided I'm going to be an atheist because there is no God. During my teenage years, God did have mercy upon me and allowed me one opportunity to hear about Jesus. But I threw it away.

My aunt and uncle, faithful aunt and uncle, they came to me one day at the house when my parents were gone, tried to tell me about Christ Jesus. I wouldn't even let them talk about Jesus. I mocked them.

I made fun of them. I sent them away humiliated by my mockings and my laughings. And they went out the door.

And I went my way. And I went down and down and down, which is the only way that anybody ever goes when you reject the light of the Gospel. You go down and down and down.

A few years after that, I went into the army. And the army did what the army does to most people. It defiled me more than anything ever had.

In the army, there was all kinds of filth, all kinds of wickedness, all kinds of drugs and drinking, all kinds of false philosophies. And there while I was in the army, I strengthened my convictions and became a strong atheist. I began to study.

I read Sigmund Freud. I read Charles Darwin, Origin of Species. I read about Huxley.

I read some of the writings of Plato. And as I read all these people, it just strengthened my convictions that there was no God, all the way while I was in the army. I used to make fun of Christians.

I must admit, I never met a real one who knew their Bible well enough to put me in my place. I usually argued them into the corner and sent them away ashamed, not having answers to the questions that I

would throw at them. I wished one time I had met a real one who could have put me in my place and opened up the Word of God and shut my mouth by the Word of God, but I never did.

Well, I got out of the military and I came home and just continued in my life the way that it was there in the military. I continued right down the same vein after I got out of the army until one night. And I remember this night so clearly in my experience.

It was a summer night. I'd been to a party somewhere. I left the party.

I was sitting out on the grass looking up at the stars. It was a beautiful summer night. It was one of those summer nights where the clouds were nowhere in sight and the heavens were just gloriously arrayed up in front of me.

And I was sitting there looking up at the heavens and they were preaching to me. I didn't know that back then, but they were just preaching about the glory of God. And God was preaching to me.

And God was saying, I am and I made all these things. I'm God. I'm the Creator and I made all these things.

And I remember that night as I gazed up into the heavens, saying out loud with no one else around to hear me, looking up at the heavens I said to myself, I wonder if maybe there is a God. I was looking at this glorious display that our mighty and majestic God had made. And it was preaching to me.

And the question came into my mind and my heart. And I believe that was the first time that I opened my door a little bit to God and the light of God. But it was enough, hallelujah! It was enough for God's Spirit to run after me.

That was the summer. By February of the next year, I was under such deep conviction, I didn't know what was wrong with me. My girlfriend, which is my wife now, God used her to convict me of my need, even though she wasn't even a Christian.

She had some morality about her. She loved old people. She loved little children.

And I couldn't stand either one of them. It was the last place I'd want to be is somewhere where there'd be some little children or an old person around. I couldn't stand them.

And she'd reach out to them and love them. And this brought conviction upon my heart and I realized, there must be something that I'm missing. There must be something that she has that I don't have.

And I remember this question kept ringing in my heart. Maybe there is a God. Maybe there is a God.

I wonder if there is a God. Until finally one morning I woke up and I was just consumed with it. And I said, I'm going to find out if there's a God.

I'm going to find out no matter what it costs me. My girlfriend, which is my wife, she said, What are you going to do? And I said, I don't know, but I'm going to find out if there's a God. I've got to get the answer to this question.

And I don't know where I got all these things in my mind, because I never read the Bible. But I told her, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to go get me a motel.

And I'm going to lock myself in that motel room. I'm going to take a week off work. I'm going to lock myself in that motel room.

And I'm not going to eat until I find out if there's a God. And I don't even know where I got all those things. And I left her that day.

Walked away and she was crying. She thought I was off my rocker. She thought there was something desperately wrong with me.

And I left that day to make the arrangements. Went to my boss. He was a Jew.

Told him what I needed. I told him I need a week off of work. I want to find out if there's a God.

And he gave me the week off work. Probably didn't understand me either. And I got my motel.

And everything was set. I was ready to go. Then it dawned on me toward the end of the day.

I don't even have anything to read. How am I going to find out if there's a God if I don't have anything to read? And then it came to my mind and I know now so clearly. It was the Spirit of the Living God who said to me, What about your aunt and uncle? Those fanatics.

They'll tell you what to read. And I thought, yes. Aunt Pearl and Uncle Don.

They'll tell me what to read. And I went over to their house and knocked on the door that evening. And there I stood outside the door.

Long hair. Had a beard of rebellion on my face. Had a little marijuana in my back pocket.

And I stood there at the front door. And Aunt Pearl opened up the door and said, Well, Denny, what do you want? And I stood there completely innocent. Not realizing how it would shock her.

And I said, Aunt Pearl, I want to find out if there's a God. Do you know of any good books I can read? Oh, sure. So, when her heart must have flip-flopped that evening, she said, Well, sure.

Come on in. And she convinced me to come inside the house there. And she brought me over to the dining room table and took a big black Bible just like this one here this morning.

And she opened it up and took me down the Romans' road to salvation there in the book of Romans and showed me that I was a sinner and showed me that I was on my way to hell. And she showed me that Jesus died for me and He could set me free and He could change my life. And then she showed me all you have to do is get on your knees right here and call upon the name of the Lord and He'll save you.

And she said, Denny, wouldn't you like to just kneel right down here and pray right now? Oh, no way. I've never been on my knees. I don't know how to pray.

It embarrassed me. I said, No. No, thank you.

No prayer for me. Okay. She could tell that was as far as she could take me.

She could tell that I kind of got ruffled by that. So she took her black Bible just like this is my black Bible and it's all marked. I've got notes in it and all over the place.

She took her black Bible and she stuck it in my hand and she said, You take this with you and you take this to the motel and you'll find out if there's a God or not. I said, Alright. I'll do it.

So I left her house with a big black Bible in this hand and a lid of marijuana in this pocket and I went out and got into my car and I was going over to my friend's house. We were going to get high one more time and then I was going to the motel. I'd already made the arrangements, called him up.

He was waiting for me to pick him up. I pulled down in front of his house. He was standing in the doorway waiting for me.

As soon as I pulled up, he took off running from the door of his house to the car and he reached out to get a hold of the car door and just like that, something came over me and I hit the gas pedal and pulled away and just left him standing there with his hand out just like this. Wondering, what is wrong with this guy? And you know, as I look back on that evening, it was the mercy of God. It was the mercy of God.

He had put that seed in my heart and the devil was ready to snatch it out and I believe if I had went with that friend that evening and we had got high, the devil would have snatched those seeds right out of my heart. But God who is rich in mercy, in the love wherewith He loved me, He caused me to pull away from that place and I left him standing there and I didn't even call him for a couple of days. He didn't know what happened to me.

And I drove away and drove around in Omaha, Nebraska for two hours. Later, I found out my aunt had been praying for me much while I was driving around the city of Omaha, Nebraska. She was praying, Oh God, don't let the seed come out of that heart.

Oh God, save this boy. And I wrestled. And for two hours I wrestled.

God wrestled with me and I wrestled with Him. And I realized this is going to mean something. This decision that I need to make is going to mean something.

It's going to change my life. And finally after two hours, I pulled the car over to the side of the road and I just cried out to God and I said, God, I give up. I'm a sinner.

I know I'm going to hell. Will You please save me? And just like that, heaven came down and the glory of God filled my soul and that weight of sin rolled off of my back and I was forgiven and I knew that I was. It was so clear to me.

I spoke the words out loud again and nobody was around and I said, it worked! It worked! What a glorious evening that was for me. Well, I went over to the house where Jackie was and she was sitting there watching television and I come busting in the door and of course she didn't expect to see me for a week. And she wondered, what are you doing here? And I told her, well, Jackie, everything's alright.

I don't need to go to the motel. I'm saved now. And she looked at me and she said, well, good, so am I. Now we're both saved.

She had a few things to learn about salvation. But I got on the telephone and I called my aunt and told her what God had done and she was so happy. And I went to bed that night.

And the next morning I woke up to this book right here. That black book that my aunt had given me and I opened it up and all of a sudden this book that I never believed, refused to read, mocked it, made all kinds

of jokes about it, all of a sudden this book was very precious to me and I started reading it. And for some reason, I think maybe to renew my mind, God put such an insatiable desire to read the Word of God in those first days of my Christian life, I think a couple of years of my Christian life.

It was two and three hours a day that I read the Bible. I just read it and read it and read it. I couldn't get enough of it.

It was God's Word. This is how God feels. And I want to know how God feels because I never knew there was a God.

And now I've met Him. And I want to know what He thinks. And I want to live the way He wants me to live.

And I was consumed with reading the Bible. I remember the day after I was converted, I was taking Jackie somewhere and I looked over at her while I was driving. Maybe she was driving.

I can't remember. And I said, you know what? And I still had long hair and a beard. And I still had a lot of needs in my life.

But I looked over and I said, you know, I think God wants me to be a preacher. Can you believe that? I think He wants me to be a preacher. I found the answer.

I know what all my college buddies are looking for. I'd sat in all those rep sessions at college. I'd heard all the things they talked about, all the philosophies that they had.

Now I knew the answer. Now I knew what they were looking for. And I thought in my heart, I'm going to tell everybody I can.

I found the answer. They need the same thing. And like so many young Christians do, I took off in that zeal, not realizing that people would spit in my face and laugh at me when I'd tell them.

I went and told all my buddies. They thought I was crazy. They said I'll get over it.

They said it will pass away and He'll be back. But I've never been back. Hallelujah! 17 years and I haven't been back.

Well, from February to June, many changes took place in my life. We, Jackie and I both, we started going to the Baptist church. The preacher there sort of convinced Jackie that she was alright.

But one day when she was out soul winning with my Aunt Pearl, she got to see my aunt lead a Catholic lady to the Lord Jesus. Took her all the way through the plan of salvation. Saw the lady get down on her knees there in the living room and just pour her heart out before God in repentance and receive Christ as her Lord and Savior.

And God spoke to Jackie's heart and said, you've never done anything like that. And she went out to the car and gave her heart to the Lord Jesus. That was in June, I believe.

We were married in November of the same year, somewhat unwisely. We both looked back on it and we wished somebody would have had enough wisdom to tell us that we needed to grow in the Lord. But the little Baptist church wanted a nice little couple in the church and they thought it would be wonderful if we'd get married.

So they encouraged us to get married and we got married prematurely. We've had our share of struggles because of that. But God has been faithful to us through the years.

In January, they shipped us off to Bible school. We pulled out of Omaha, Nebraska with our little car and a U-Haul trailer pulling behind heading for Hammond, Indiana to go to Bible school. Didn't know anybody there.

Didn't know where we were going to live. Didn't know what kind of job I'd get. Just knew that we were supposed to go to Bible school in Hammond, Indiana.

And we pulled in there in January of 1974. And I found a great blessing to my life. When we got to that Bible school, it was a blessing.

It was just a small school then. 300 students. About 150 young preacher boys aspiring to the work of God.

And I walked into that place and here these young men are out preaching on the street corners. They're out soul winning. They're having all-night prayer meetings.

And I found all these things and I thought this has got to be the closest thing to heaven on earth. And I jumped into that school with both feet. I gave myself to the school.

I submitted myself to the authority of that school. I listened to the teachers in that school. And God worked in my life while I was in school.

I wouldn't trade it, even though I've had to unlearn a few things since I left there. There are some things that I got there that have been the guiding posts in my ministry ever since, and I wouldn't trade them for anything. Well, the Lord began to bless.

I got into the bus ministry. And the Lord blessed that. And many, many children started riding the buses.

And after that, after my graduation from school, the church there, they noticed that the Lord's blessing was upon my work and they called me to stay there and be an associate pastor in the church there in Hammond, Indiana. So, at my graduation time, I was ordained into the ministry. And while I was there for two years after that, I grew much in influence in the college.

The college was growing very, very fast, and I just grew and grew in influence there. And it looked to me like the next step for me is a nationwide ministry, being a Baptist preacher and going all over the country preaching the Gospel. I saw it.

I said, this is where I'm going. And I knew that someday that's where I'm going to be. But God had some other things in mind.

Somebody gave me a tape. I wonder how many could say that this morning. Somebody gave me a tape.

But somebody gave me a tape. And it was a tape on the cross of Christ in the life of the believer. And I put that tape in my brand new Cutlass Supreme that the church paid for.

I put that tape in that car and I listened to it one time. And it was a powerful tape. It spoke about a depth of knowing God.

It spoke about a crucifixion. It spoke about a dying to yourself that I knew that I had never had any kind of a touch like that or any experience like that. When I got done with the tape, I stuck it back in again.

And I don't know how many times I listened to it, but I know it was dozens and dozens of times that I listened to that one tape. Each time listening to it, crying to God, saying, Oh God, I know I have a lot of needs in my life. I pray, Lord, do it.

Lord, whatever You've got to do to me, do it! I want everything You've got for me, Lord. I'm not satisfied where I'm at. I want to grow.

And if growing means dying, then I want to die. Little did I know what I was praying when I prayed that prayer, but I prayed it many times, many times. Then the Lord ordered a very traumatic experience for us.

We were brother Denny and sister Jackie, well known, looked up to, much respected in the college. And through some mistakes that I made and some misunderstanding of doctrine there, my whole life was turned upside down. Or I should say, our whole life was turned upside down.

And I went from brother Denny, brother Keniston, Mr. Somebody, Mr. Man of God, to a nobody. You're fired. You're expelled from school.

Get out of here. We don't want you around. We don't understand what you're doing, but we don't want you around.

And everything was just pulled right out from underneath me. I lost it all. I didn't understand.

I went to my basement. I fell on my face before God and I just wept until there was no more weeping left in me. I wept and wept and wept.

But God was in it all. He knew what a proud man I was. He knew what an arrogant preacher I was.

He knew how much impurity was in my life. And He knew that He needed to do a great work in me. So, for a year and a half, we studied the Bible.

I went into that basement with a desire to find out what I believed. I had to admit I don't know what I believe. I know what they taught me in school, but I don't know what I believe.

And I went into the basement. I had a study there in the basement with a desire to find out what I believe. And God, in a miraculous way, He led us not to work for a year and a half.

For a year and a half, I didn't work. Before that, I was a salaried preacher. Everything cared for.

Car cared for. House cared for. Oh, it was nice! But God led me not to go to work.

And for a year and a half, I studied the Bible. I searched the Scriptures. I studied books.

I prayed. I fasted. I was searching for truth.

I wanted to find out what do I believe. Not what does the Baptist say, but what does the Bible say. And I would encourage every one of you this morning that you ought to have that same kind of heart.

It's not what the Mennonites say. It's not what the brethren say. It's not what the Baptists say.

It's what does the Bible say. That's the only way we can be building on a sure foundation. And that was the cry of my heart as I went into the basement.

And for a year and a half, the Lord graciously met our needs month by month. For a year and a half, which was a great blessing to us. It was like God was saying, I still love you, even though you're in the crucible, even though you're in the frying pan, even though it's real hot and I've turned the fire up as hot as I can, I still love you.

And the Lord met our needs for a year and a half. And after the finances stopped coming, we went out and got a job. But at the end of that year and a half, I didn't know where I belonged.

I didn't know what I was. I wondered, am I crazy? Am I crazy? Is there anybody else that thinks like me? Or am I just weird and crazy and I'll be by myself the rest of my life? I hadn't preached for a year and a half. That was probably the greatest trial I ever went through.

But then God led me through. I think I was listening to a tape by Leonard Ravenhill, and he mentioned a book on church history called The Pilgrim Church. He said it's the most inspirational church history book you could ever find.

And I went out and found it as soon as I could. And I sat down and I started reading. And I started with the early church fathers and I read all the way up to the present day.

It was a 500-page book. I read it in two days. I just consumed it.

I wept while I read it. I looked in there. I saw all these different groups of God's people.

And I looked at them and I said, Lord, that's what I am. That's what I am right there. But is there anybody like this? Is there anything like this, Lord? And I cried to the Lord.

About a week after I finished that book, I got a phone call from Tennessee. A preacher friend of mine, he got on the telephone and he said, Brother, you won't believe what I found. You won't believe what I found.

He said, I found some 15th century Waldensians down here in the hills of Tennessee. Waldensians! I just read about the Waldensians! I knew about them! And when he said that, that was all I needed. I said, I'm coming.

I'm coming as soon as I can get there. And we packed our things up and we took a weekend trip down to Tennessee to see these people. He had met a group of conservative Mennonite people down in Tennessee.

And he was really blessed by the holiness of their lives and encouraged me that I should come also and meet these people. So we went down there, just the way we were, and walked into the back of the church house on a Sunday morning. And the first thing we saw is we saw a little bit what we see here on Sunday morning.

We saw all the sisters sitting on one side, all the brethren sitting on the other side, all these sisters clothed in modest apparel, which was such a grief to me. Back where I came from, there was so much immodesty. I saw all these sisters veiled with veilings.

I had never seen anything like that before. But when I stood in the back of that church house, the Lord bore clear witness in my heart, these are some of my people and you can learn from them. And I looked upon that congregation and I said in my heart, it's beautiful! It's beautiful! And my dear wife, she looked at the same congregation and she said in her heart, yuck! Yuck! It was traumatic for her.

They split us up, put me down in the front row on the men's side and put her over there somewhere with the children and here she was in a new place, insecure, and they sat her over there by herself and it was traumatic for her. But after the service was over, which was a bit dry, and I guess I just overlooked the dryness of the service. I was so interested in these people.

When it was over, I started talking to these men and they knew their Bibles. I mean, they quoted verse after verse after verse and I thought to myself, what is this? Preachers know their Bibles, but here are all these men, they all know their Bibles. I thought this is very unusual.

Somebody took us home for lunch, went into this house. Mom, Dad, must have been nine children. Mom was in order.

Sweetly submission to the Father. The Father was the head of the home. The children were in order and subjection around the table.

And I mean, my heart was just flip-flopping on the inside. I thought, this is what I need. I need some of this.

I need some example. I don't know my way in all these things. And after that Sunday afternoon dinner, we went back to the friend's house and Jackie wanted to go for a walk.

She and I took a little walk and we got a little ways away from the house and she said, Denny, you're not going to make me move down here, are you? And I said, well, Mom, I don't know. I just don't know. There are some things here that we don't have.

I want to have everything that God has for us. And we spent the rest of the weekend there and headed back home with a Kaufman's Doctrines of the Bible in my hand so that I could find out if these people were sound or not. And we went back to Hammond, Indiana to pray.

So for one month, we sought the Lord, we prayed together, we fasted some, we studied the Bible, we discussed many things, and finally God brought us to a place of unity and we both agreed, this is what God is saying we need to do. We don't understand it. It's a step of faith.

It's a step out into a bunch of unknown things. But God is telling us to do it and we're going to do it. We made up our mind.

The greatest fear I had was no evangelism. All the people that I knew there in the Baptist church, they warned me. They said, don't you go down there among those people.

They don't win souls. They're not concerned about the lost. Stay away from them.

You'll get deceived. And I think that's a good challenge for every one of us this morning. God forbid, if we be the people of God, that we're known as a people who do not evangelize.

But that was my biggest fear. These people don't evangelize. They're not burdened about souls.

I was concerned. Well, we decided this is God's will. We had a big garage sale.

Mama sold all her pretty dresses. All Rebecca's pretty dresses. All of Elizabeth's pretty dresses.

And all of her friends came to the garage sale. Oh, they were just delighted to buy up her nice dresses. And, what are you doing? Why are you selling all these things? Well, we tried to explain to everybody what we were doing.

Nobody understood. Finally, after we had all of our things packed up and the trucks were heading back to Tennessee, there we sat in our empty house in Hammond, Indiana. Red Camaro sitting out in the front driveway.

That's what we had, an old red Camaro. Jackie put on one of those plain dresses and put a covering on her head. And we were all waiting in the car and she came to the door and she looked this way to see if the neighbors were looking.

She looked this way to see if the neighbors were looking. And she ran with everything she had and jumped into the car and cried like a baby. Just mortified her.

Just crucified her. But she got in that car and we headed down to Tennessee. Plain clothes, covering, modest apparel in a red Camaro.

And she didn't stop crying until we stopped about halfway down there. We stopped at a shopping mall to buy something. And we walked up to the door and all of a sudden men started opening the door for her and saying, yes ma'am and excuse me and all of this.

And she realized there's a respect coming her way that she never got out of men before. And it quieted her heart. So there we were in Tennessee.

We spent ten months there learning. Learning as many things as we could. We asked questions.

We listened. We studied. We learned.

And God changed many of the things in our life while we were there. We gained some convictions that we needed. But at the end of the ten months, we just didn't feel like we could unite ourselves with the fellowship there simply because we saw that the body of Christ was bigger.

And we sensed in our heart if we join this church, the only way we'll get out is by excommunication. And I didn't want that. I didn't know what it was, but I knew enough about it to know that I didn't want it.

We felt the body of Christ was bigger. That out of every nation and kindred and tongue and people, He had called out a people unto Himself. So we were cautious there during that examination time.

We just dwelt among the Mennonites there. Oh, it was a blessing. They were lovely people.

I just have nothing but good feelings of love toward them even to this day for the things that they did for us while we were there. But as we moved among the Mennonites, something kept longing down in our hearts. We saw their holy lives, but we just felt there's something missing there.

Isn't there a way that we could put some fire into this? Isn't there some way that we could put some life and some zeal into this? The covering is good. The modesty is good. All of these things are good.

But couldn't we put some fire into it? Couldn't there be some Holy Ghost fire in it? That was a cry that was coming up out of our hearts. During that time, we met Brother Mose and Sister Rhoda. They were down in Tennessee.

They came to a wedding reception where we were at. And I noticed this couple sitting in the back. And there was something unusual about them.

They had a dirty little bus kid sitting on their lap. And that, oh, that stuck out to me. I'd seen hundreds and thousands of dirty little bus kids.

Little Spanish children. Little black children with the runny nose and things like that. And they had a little Spanish girl sitting on their lap that had an eye tear duct problem.

And her tear ducts were always seeping pus. And she had this stuff on her face. But it was a divine appointment from God.

I don't even think I would have walked up to them and asked them who they were. But I saw that dirty little bus kid sitting on that Mennonite couple's lap. And I went back there to find out who they were.

Found out they go preaching. They go to Boston. They go out on the street corners and preach the Gospel.

And I thought, amen! That's just exactly what I'm looking for. I didn't know there was anybody like that. Well, it was shortly after that we had a wedding up here in Philadelphia.

Brother Paul Renier and Sister Denise. A lot of you know them. I stood up in their wedding.

So we came up here for the wedding. During the very time that some brethren here were having meetings on the recovery of the Anabaptist vision. Maybe some of you remember that.

It was over in the old New Holland Mennonite church building. They were having meetings about six Friday nights in a row. And we passed through here.

And they asked me to have a message before the teaching session. I'll never forget that evening. It's one of those milestones in my life.

It was the first time that I opened up my heart and really preached in three years. And I had no idea what God had done inside. You know, when you're in the fire, you don't know what God is doing.

Sometimes you may go one or two or three years and not even know what God is doing until later. But that night when I stood up behind that pulpit and I opened up my mouth to preach and I hadn't preached for three years, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe how different I was.

I couldn't believe the brokenness of my heart. I couldn't believe what flowed out of my heart. And I only lasted about ten minutes and my throat was raw and I couldn't go anymore because I hadn't preached.

But when the service was over, I just stole away. I went up there somewhere in the top of that building. I don't know where it is now.

And I found a dark room and I fell on my face there and I just said, Lord, thank You. Thank You for all the cross. Thank You for all the trials.

Thank You for all the buffeting. Thank You for all the humiliation, Lord. Thank You for every bit of it.

It's worth it. It's worth it. It's worth it a thousand times over.

And I would say to you this morning, if you find yourself in God's crucible, it's worth it! He knows what He's doing. He is a loving God and He wants to purify His people. And I guess it was that night where it really dawned on me what God had done inside my heart and life through those three years of not preaching.

It was so different. From those meetings, when the meetings were over, there was some interest with a few families and with Brother Moe's to start a church up here. The cry was, we want a conservative church, but we want to have an emphasis on evangelism and spiritual life.

Oh, when I heard that, that's exactly what my heart said. Sure, this is fine. Sure, the covering is fine.

Sure, all these things are fine, but what about evangelism? What about the souls of men? What about spiritual life? What about prayers that God answers? What about mighty movings of God's Spirit? Where are they? And it was the burden of my heart. And a call came from Brother Moe's and these other few families to come up. Would you come up and help start a church? We felt God's call in the whole thing.

Back when we were in Hammond, Indiana and we were praying about changing, making this change of direction, God had told me, clearly one evening while I was praying, God spoke to my heart and said, you go this way and I'll open up a door of utterance for you. And I hadn't preached for a long time and I felt this was God's answer to that witness which was, oh, probably a year, a year before that. You go this way, I'll open up a door of utterance for you.

I'll open your mouth again. I'll release your preaching gifts. Go this way.

So we felt led of the Lord to move up here. And that was eight and a half years ago that a few families met together in Brother Moe's basement and we started a church back in May eight and a half years ago. Many trials have gone by since those days.

Sometimes we doubted God's leading, but every time we got alone with God, God said, this is the way. Walk in it. Trust Me.

You just trust Me, Denny. You just trust Me, Jackie. I'm in this whole thing.

Many trials we went through, but here we are today and we just thank God for what He's doing. We feel unworthy of the blessings. We know what we are.

We know the pit from which we came. We know we have a lot of rough edges. I'm sure you've seen them through the last several years.

We have some rough edges. But I thank God so many times that God would let me pastor such a people, that God would let my children grow up here. Oh, I thank God for that.

And that He, by His grace, would expand the work of God. And I often think about it as I'm sitting in church services. Am I here? Am I really here? Is this me? Is this really me? You know, and sometimes I think I need to pinch myself to see if this is real or not.

But it is real. And I love the Lord and I want to serve Him. By His grace, we want to finish the course that God has laid out for us.

May I just thank Him and praise Him for His divine leadings. Oh, listen, God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. If ten years ago you would have told me I would be right here, I would have never believed you.

In fact, if you would have showed me, I probably would have ran away twelve years ago. But God works in mysterious ways and we thank Him in praising for that. Let's kneel together in prayer.

Father, we just give You praise again this morning. We come to You in Jesus' name. Oh, Father, I just pray, take this little testimony about two hippies, Lord, that God changed.

And just use it, Lord, in people's lives. Maybe there's somebody here today, dear God, who's a mess, whose life is a mess. They're all mixed up.

God, I just pray, You minister to the needs that are here. Father, we thank You this morning for the way that You work in people's lives. Oh, the stories are endless, Lord.

I know they are. The trophies of grace, there more than can be numbered. But we thank You this morning for the way that You work in people's lives.

And I pray, dear God, give us some more. Give us some more, dear Father, people in whom You put Your hand on, sought them, bought them, redeemed them, sanctified them, purified them, filled them, and used them. Oh, God, I pray that You'll do it again and again and again through our lives, Father.

Reach out to other lives, through the lives of the people that are in this room. Dear Father, we want to just commit the furthest service into Your hands, God. And I pray, be merciful to us and bless us, cause Thy face to shine on us.

Lord, bless the children this morning with a good message that will enlighten their innocent hearts, oh God, to the right ways of God. Father, we pray Your blessing upon our brother Aaron also, as he preaches to us later. Lord, we commit all these things into Your hands.

We pray in the name of Jesus together. Amen.

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