

Testimony

by Jacquelyn Johnson
Lost Catholic to Saved by Grace

My name is Jacquelyn Johnson and I'm twenty-two years old.

Growing up, I always believed that there was a God. In Romans one we find out that creation testifies to God and His attributes, and that's exactly right. I remember looking at the clouds and the stars and even the ants and just something inside me said, "There's a Creator out there."

I remember my mom praying with me before I would go to bed. She raised me to be obedient to her and to my father.

When it came time for me to go to elementary school, I went to a Catholic school. I went through a lot of the Catholic rituals, we had religion classes and we even had mass every Tuesday and Thursday morning. My teachers were moral people and the idea of being moral just appealed to me. That was something I wanted to be.

I remember my first confession. The priest assigned me ten "Our Father's" as penance to remove my sin. And from that point on, every night before I would go to bed I would say those ten "Our Father's". I never really thought I had messed up, but I figured, well just in case, I want to have a back up plan and those ten "Our Father's" were my backup plan. From that point on, I always had the idea that spiritually you had to work for things and spiritually you had to earn things.

During the rest of my years as I grew up I was the epitome of a good person. I was always, "Yes ma'am". I was always, "No ma'am". I always got good grades. The only alcohol I ever consumed was wine at Catholic communion. I never cursed. I went to mass from time to time. I would pray often and I would even read my Bible from time to time and people were always complimenting me. They were always saying, "Oh, she's such a good person!"; "Oh, she's so kind!"; "Oh, she's so respectful!"; and I started to believe that I was a good person.

It's funny because I had this idea that heaven graded on a curve. I thought that God was up there and He was looking down at people and that He was breaking people down into percentages. I thought that the top percentage of people were the ones that went to heaven.

I looked around and I saw a man over there getting drunk; I saw a girl over there getting high; I saw this girl that would constantly sleep around; I saw this girl that was cussing at her parents and compared to those people, I felt really good about myself. I thought I was a good person. I thought God was pleased with me and I thought I was going to heaven when I died and it couldn't hurt that I had all these good works to back me up. I mean, I was tutoring my class mates, I was going to nursing homes, I was doing all this community service and I thought, "God has to be pleased with me" and that's exactly what I thought.

Sophomore year of high school my mom said, "We're going to go visit a Baptist church." Growing up in the environment that I grew up in, you hear all these jokes about Baptists, "They're so serious, they don't sing, they don't dance, they dress from another century," but we went anyway. One of the first things that I remember distinctly is actually taking a Bible to church and not only that, actually opening the Bible in church. Everyone there was so nice. They were so kind. They weren't falling asleep there and at first, I thought, "This has to be fake," but something in my mind says, "You know what, it doesn't matter, they're moral people, I'm moral people, I'll fit right in."

We continued attending that church and some of the first sermons I hear, the pastor mentioned words like, "born-again" and "saved". I never heard those words before. I didn't even know where the preacher got those words. I



thought he made them up but I figured, “You know what, as time goes along, I’ll figure out what these words mean.”

I graduated from high school and I was perfectly content with my life. Spiritually, I felt successful, I felt like I was good with God. Everything was fine and in senior summer of high school things started to change. For three months there was nothing but constant conflict and feuding. Day in and day out there was just fighting and it started to weigh very heavy on me. I’d try to go to my room, I’d try to avoid everyone, I’d try to pretend like the problems didn’t exist, but I was constantly confronted with what was going on in my family.

Then one day, this little bit of anger and this little bit of rage and hate just starts to grow. It gets to the point where it’s like a cancer and it consumes everything inside me. It gets to the point where all I’m thinking about is murderous, evil, wicked thoughts and then one day those thoughts just turned towards myself and I start hating myself, I start despising myself, I start hating my life and I want a way out. I don’t want to wait until August to move. I want out now, I want to end my life now.

I thought of different ways to kill myself. There were a few times where I came very, very close. I realize that it was the grace of God now, but at the time, it made me more angry that I didn’t even have the guts to kill myself and the guts to end my life. I remember one time, I’m just sitting against the side of my bed, my knees are against my chest, I’m just sobbing and something hits me, it’s like a moment of perfect clarity. For that moment I saw that all those murderous, suicidal thoughts were filthy and they literally made me sick to my stomach. The more I thought, the more I realized that my so called good deeds and my so called goodness had nothing whatsoever to do with God. It was all about me. It was all about my ego, my reputation. How did I look?

Jeremiah 17:9 says that the heart’s deceitful. I looked back on those eighteen years of my life and I realized I had been nothing but deceiving myself for the entire time. I was more angry with myself, I was disgusted with myself, I was disgusted with my nature. I wanted to change, but physically and mentally and emotionally I was just too exhausted to try to reform myself. I was too exhausted to try to figure out how to fix this. So, I became apathetic. All I wanted to do was stay in bed and live day to day and die and be done with this whole existence thing. I was tired.

August 2005, I moved into my dorm in San Antonio. It’s about a week or two before classes start and I turn to a Christian radio program and there’s this host and he’s talking to this man. One of the first things the host tells that man is, “Do you know that in Matthew five Christ says being really angry with somebody, being really hateful towards somebody, is the equivalent to murder?” I had never heard that before. I thought the host was lying. I was like, “God... there’s no way God said that.” So I took up my Bible, I went to Matthew five just to prove this guy wrong and sure enough, that’s exactly what Christ said.

The guy says, “Well, I’m a good person.” I would have said that too. The host took that man to Romans chapter three, verses ten through eighteen, and as the host was going through those verses, I’m reading along. “There is no one good, no not one. There is no one that seeks after God.”

No one had ever bothered to tell me, “You’re not a good person. There’s something wrong with you,” but God Himself was telling me that I wasn’t good. Immediately, I start thinking about excuses, I start thinking about defenses. “Well, what about my good deeds, God? What about my good works?”

By God’s sovereignty, that’s exactly what the man being interviewed said. The host took that man to Isaiah 64:6, “All of our good deeds are like filthy rags.” Outside of Christ, all our little good deeds are an abomination, filthy before God.

I started to panic. For the first time in my life I was scared. I started putting two and two together. If hate equals murder, if there’s no one good, if I can’t do anything good enough to go to heaven, then me and everyone around me deserves hell. Then Jacquelyn Johnson, little miss straight A student, little miss goodie two shoes, little miss perfect, deserves hell.

I started flipping through my Bible, going through Scriptures. I came across Ephesians chapter two, and in the beginning of that chapter it talks about how man is naturally dead in sin, how he’s a child of the devil and how he’s a child of wrath and how that can only change through Christ.

What struck me about that passage, is that there was no one in between. You're either dead in your sin or you're alive in Christ. You're a child of the devil and a child of wrath or you're clothed in Christ's righteousness, in His righteousness. There's no gray area. There's no in between and there's no middle ground.

If you would have asked me at that point, "Does Jacquelyn Johnson love God?", I would have said, "Well, I'm kind of in the middle. I don't love Him...I'm not one of those Jesus freaks, but I don't hate God either."

But you know what Scripture says? Scripture says I was dead in sin. Scripture said I love myself more than I love God. Scripture said, in Romans chapter eight, that my mind was at enmity with God. I was an enemy of God, contrary to what I would have told you at that point.

Then I start thinking, "Does God require perfection?" and ultimately, the answer is yes. You have to be perfect to get to heaven. People say, "That's absurd!" but think about this, God is perfect, God is holy and God is righteous. Based on those characteristics alone, God cannot tolerate sin in His presence.

James 2:10 says that you break the law in one point... you tell one little lie, one little time, you've broken the entire law. You could give up. Game over. And again, people say, "That's ridiculous!"

What people don't realize and what I didn't realize for eighteen years of my life is that we are not judged according to a standard we make up. We are judged according to God's standard. We are not judged by comparing ourselves to people around us. The funny thing is, you can always find someone that looks worse than you. You can always find someone that gives your ego a boost and your sense of self esteem a boost and your sense of pride a boost.

It's like taking a sheep and placing that sheep against the grass. That animal might look pretty white. You take that same animal and you place it against the snow, it looks filthy and dirty. It's not so clean anymore and that's exactly what Scripture does. Scripture's like a mirror. God shows you, this is your real nature, this is what you really are, this is really how I see you and ultimately this is really all that matters.

God confronted me and He showed me that I had a sinful record before God. He showed me that my mind and my heart and everything about me was filthy, was wicked, was evil, was depraved, was destitute. There was nothing good about me. He showed me I had no merit in and of myself to save myself. I wasn't good. More importantly, He showed me that, for eighteen years of my life I had sinned against Him. The same God that gave me life, for eighteen years I did nothing but shake my fist in His face.

I was humbled and I was crushed. Every defense I had ever known was stripped away and I gave up on trying to save myself and on my face, I cried out to God, "God, don't leave me! God, save me! God, forgive me! God, help me! God, change me!", and He did! I turned, I repented from that self righteous garbage and I turned from being my own God, from being my own idol. I turned from all that to the God of the Scriptures, the One True God. I can't take any credit for it. I can't get any glory for it. It was all by God's grace! It was all by His doing. To God alone be the glory! To Him only!

The thing about Christ dying on the cross, it's not just that some Romans whipped a man, put a crown of thorns on His head. It's that at that cross, Christ took the cup of God's wrath and He drank that cup drop by drop and when the cup was turned over, nothing was left. Christ said, "It is finished!" Christ didn't deserve that wrath. He was sinless and He was perfect in word, thought and deed. He didn't deserve it, but I deserved it. He took my wrath, He took my punishment for me. Not only did He take my sin, but now when God looks down at me, that girl that used to be so suicidal and so arrogant and so self righteous, when He looks at that kid, He sees the perfect righteousness of His Son. He sees the perfection of His Son when He looks at me.

Not only that, at that cross Christ purchased for me a new nature. He didn't use gold and He didn't use silver. He purchased a new nature for me with His own precious blood.

Ezekiel 36:26 says that God took my heart of stone and He gave me a heart of flesh. He gave me new desires. The sin I used to laugh at, the sin I used to enjoy, the sin I used to roll around in, I hate. I do stumble, but my attitude towards those things is completely different. My attitude towards God is completely different.

He took a soul that was dead and destitute, that was helpless and sinful and He breathed life into that soul. I used to be a child of the devil, I used to be a child of wrath and now by the grace of God, I'm a child of God. I'm clothed in the righteousness of Christ. That is exactly what being born again means. That is exactly what being a Christian is all about.

This isn't even about just avoiding hell. This is about knowing that when I die, I get to spend eternity knowing and being in the presence of my Savior. I get to spend eternity at His feet, thanking Him and worshipping Him for everything He's done, more importantly, for everything that He is. That's what I get to spend eternity doing! Going to church, reading your Bible, saying ten "Our Father's" before you go to bed, abstaining from drinking and having a clean mouth, all these things will not save you.

I spent eighteen years of my life as a self righteous Pharisee. I deceived myself into thinking that I was good. I deceived myself into thinking that I was a Christian. Christianity is nothing short of a super natural work of God.

Examine yourself to see if you are in the faith. Do not be deceived. Do not think for a single moment that drug addicts, prostitutes and people that go to AA are the only ones that need a Savior. Do not get me wrong, those people desperately need Christ! but so do the arrogant, the prideful and the self righteous!

Do not be deceived! We get to Matthew 7 and there's men and women standing before God on judgment day and they say, "God, I said there was a God! God, I said Jesus was Lord! I went to church, I called myself a Christian, I did all these things in Your name!" And what is God going to say to those people? He's going to say, "Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity! I never knew you."

I ask you a question today. Does He know you? Does He know you or are you just faking it with your little spirituality and with your morality and with your sense of religion?

Let me tell you from experience, you can fool a lot of people. I did for eighteen years of my life. You can even fool yourself. Again, I did for eighteen years of my life. God will not be fooled and God will not be mocked. Do not think for a moment that you can pull a fast one on God, that you could bribe God with your little deeds.

God's standard is nothing short of perfection and if you're not in Christ, you don't meet that standard. If you're not in Christ, you can give all your money to charity, you can do all these things, you can do all these deeds, you can be in the church twenty four/seven, but it doesn't matter. You have to be in Christ to meet God's standard!

Thanks be to God that we serve a God who shows mercy and shows grace! I serve a God who is mighty to save. He saves people and He saved me!

Jacquelyn Johnson on February 19, 2009
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