

Testimony

Joelan Schmidt Tells His Story

Prodigal Son Comes Home

My name is Joelan Schmidt, and I'd like to share my testimony – my story with you. I will tell you a little bit about where I was, and what my life was like before Christ found me. I want to tell you about the personal experience I had when I came to know Christ, and how He has been working in my life.

I was born into a family with Christian parents and grandparents, cousins and uncles and aunts, and I was raised to know the gospel as a child. My parents took my sisters and me to church every week, and made sure that we knew the truth about Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross for us.

A Childhood Profession

When I was 6 years old my parents took the family on vacation to Alaska. While on that trip, mom had been playing some Christian music recorded on 8-track, which gives you a fairly good estimation of how long ago that really was. The songs must have been speaking to me, because I was curious and I started to ask my mother questions about heaven and hell. After talking for a while, I put my head down in her lap and a few seconds later popped my head up and proudly said I was saved. When I woke my sister up in the back seat to tell her, she said she was saved too, and we promptly did what siblings do best, and got into an argument over whether she was saved or not.

As I grew up I always had a lingering doubt in the back of my head as to whether I was saved or not: – I could talk the talk, but I never had that solid assurance in my heart. I thought I might be saved, but as I got older it was obvious that my thoughts, actions and speech did not reflect salvation, or a person who had Christ dwelling in his heart. When I was 20 years old I moved out on my own.

My Favourite Bible Story

This brings us to my favorite passage in the Bible Luke 15. Some of you may know this passage very well – “The Parable of the Prodigal Son.” I love this story because it's a story that reflects my life in both a physical sense and in a spiritual sense. The Lord could just as easily have called this parable the story of Joelan Schmidt. Some have also called this the story of “The Compassionate Father.”

And Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them.

Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:11-24)

Taking My Journey into a Far Country

When I was 20 years old I moved out on my own, and immediately started hanging out with the wrong crowd. I was smoking cigarettes and marijuana, drinking and just having a good time.

My friends all thought I was a “Christian”, as they knew my background, but in reality, God was the farthest thing from my mind. I was totally preoccupied with living my life the way I wanted to live, doing whatever felt good. I was just doing my own thing.

It wasn't until I turned 28 that I started becoming interested in the music industry. To this point, I had a very good job as a senior computer technician, but as I became more and more meshed in that party scene, I quickly lost interest in anything else. I ended up quitting my day job, in favor of my new night job.

Squandering Everything on Reckless Living

It was at this point in my life I started doing serious drugs; at first it was casual, but within six months I was doing drugs every single day. It was my entire focus and I was using about \$200+ a day. I lost weight, and drugs totally took over my life. I no longer visited with my family; I missed birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, and births, all because of my addiction. I hit rock bottom when I was evicted from my home. I couldn't have failed in my life any more utterly than I had.

I was the Prodigal son in the Bible story. I had given up everything that was good in my life, and wasted my entire substance on reckless and sinful living. I was that Prodigal Son. I was the one who left my family and those who cared the most for me. I was that Prodigal Son who had abandoned everything I knew to be right. The son in the parable that the Lord spoke of was me!

The lost son in the Parable hit rock bottom and the Bible said he had fallen so low that he would have eaten the corn husks that he was feeding to the swine in the field. Like him I also hit rock bottom.

Returning to My Father's House

The hardest thing I had ever done was telling my parents how far I had fallen, and telling my mother that her son was a drug addict. I was crying and laughing at the same time, totally hysterical. But like the father in the parable we read, my parents loved me unconditionally, regardless of what I had done. They allowed me to come back home – wasted in more ways than one. At 6'5", I weighed just 130 pounds. I started to get help with my addictions.

It was very awkward at first, especially as I began to interact with those people who loved me and wanted to know what had happened in my life and why I was suddenly back. I started to attend counseling sessions each day. About three weeks later my cousin offered me a new job working with him and my uncle.

God's Perfect Timing

I'm constantly amazed, even now, by God's impeccable timing, because about two months after I had moved back home – (just enough time to have lost the constant desire for a fix) there was a special series of gospel meetings in my parent's church. The church was only 10 doors down the street.

The speakers were Peter Ramsay and Kyle Wilson, and the meetings were to last for three weeks. For the first few meetings, I went to please my mother. Even though she didn't ask me, I knew she wanted me to do.

Facing the Reality: “I am Not Saved.”

After the second or third night, I wasn't going for her anymore; I was going for myself. I think I missed only two nights in three weeks. I had always thought I was saved, and maybe just back-slidden, but the Lord was speaking to me in a way I had never let Him do before. I came to the realization that I wasn't saved, and that if I died I'd absolutely be in hell.

The preachers knew my heart was really burdened and they came to visit me at work during the duration of those gospel meetings. They would take me for coffee or for lunch, or just visit and talk about God. Everyone was praying for me. I can only imagine how many prayers were being lifted up to God for my salvation.

As those series of meetings were coming to a close. Kyle and Peter had stopped by to talk and we were discussing some of the challenges I was having with the concept of belief. I had always known there was a God in Heaven. I knew that Jesus was His Son, and that He died on the cross of Calvary for my sins. I knew that if I died without Christ I would be in hell. I knew all this, but I still wasn't a Christian or saved. Something was still missing. I couldn't understand how to believe, or how hard I needed to believe, or if I was believing the right way in the right thing. It was a huge stumbling block for me.

I still remember what Kyle said to me that day. He said: "Joel if you died right now, where would you be?"

I replied: "I'd be in hell."

He said again "Why?"

I answered: "Because that's what the Bible says"

Kyle said, "Joel, I don't understand why you're having so much trouble getting saved. You already believe the Bible when it says you deserve to go to hell because of your sins, why do you have so much trouble believing that Christ paid the price on the cross of Calvary?" That really spoke to me; but I still wasn't saved.

I was at work the following day and I was really troubled. I was struggling so much that I couldn't focus at work. I was reading and searching the internet for anything that would help me with my belief. Peter stopped by at around 10:30 and dropped a tract off for me to read; actually it was more of a book with about twenty full size pages. But he could see I was burdened so we talked for a bit and then he left.

I read and re-read through that tract like a drowning man struggling for air. It was only when I came to a section on belief that I read a small paragraph and two verses.

For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God not of works, lest any man should boast: (Ephesians 2:8-9)

If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. (Romans 10:9)

I finally understood.

I was trying to get saved so hard, that I was turning my belief into a work. God said that it's simply faith in Him and what He has done for us that saves us. Not how hard we believe in him, or how long we believe in Him. But simply submitting to Christ and accepting that what He did on the cross was enough to save me from hell, and that He did it because He loved me, and that there was nothing that could be added by me.

At Last, I'm a Christian

September 25th 2009, 2:30 in the afternoon. I finally gave up trying to "get saved", trying to work at "getting saved". I simply took God at His Word. I placed my faith in Christ, I accepted Him into my life, and trusted that He did everything necessary to save me from my sins. It was then I became a Christian.

I can remember just wanting to get home as fast as I could and tell my mom she didn't have to keep praying for me. I wanted her to know that if I died I would see her again in heaven.

My Prayer for You

I would encourage each of you reading this, who have a confession of faith, to be sure of your salvation. Really get into your Bible and find out what the Lord would have you to see from His Word.

For those of you who may not have accepted Christ as your personal Savior, I want you to know that there is nothing that you can offer God to earn salvation. No amount of money or prayer, or pilgrimages, or gold or silver, or good works or going to church will ever compare to the value of the precious blood that Jesus Christ shed on the cross of Calvary to pay for your sins.

He wants to save you right now.

In John 10 Christ portrays Himself as a shepherd that goes out to find his sheep that was lost. He goes out into a wilderness fraught with dangers – calling and searching. And when he finds that lost sheep, with tenderness he picks it up and places it on his shoulders, a place of comfort, and a place of rest. What a Savior!

Maybe God is drawing alongside you as you read this and whispering to your heart:

“I love you so very much
I sent My Son to pay the price for you
I gave up My only Son
So that you could live.”

I hope and pray that you will trust Him and make your decision for eternity.

. . . .Joelan Schmidt