



"I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart; I have declared Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and Your truth From the great assembly." (Psalms 40:10, NKJV).

MY CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

My parents took me to church and held me as a baby in their arms, while singing and hearing God's word. I remember how friends of the family shared God's love with me at Church and Sunday school. I memorized John 3:16, the Apostle's Creed and many hymns, such as "Jesus Loves Me This I Know" and "The BIBLE, That's The Book For Me." I even sang in the choir as a teenager, while Rita Beth played the piano.

I had many opportunities to develop my beliefs in Christ. Once, I put together a "Tabernacle in the Wilderness" kit during Vacation Bible School. I can remember my English teacher assigning us to memorize "The 23rd Psalm" and having us recite it in front of our eighth grade classmates. I visited many churches while growing up in a Bible-believing community.

The Bible tells us how God's Word is like a seed sown in the heart's of the hearers. The condition of man's heart is described by four types of soil. The devil steals the seed

sown in the wayward heart. There is no root for the seed sown in the stony heart. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the seed sown in the thorny heart. These soils described my heart as a child, where there was no understanding, conversion, nor healing. But in a good heart, that understands the Word of God, the seed brings forth fruit some thirty, sixty and hundredfold. ¹

The good heart is a broken heart. Just as good ground is first broken up and overturned to accept seed, so the heart of a man must be broken and overturned to accept the Word of God. As a child, I was not broken, but kept hanging onto that hard, strong and thorny condition where I was comfortable.

THE GODS OF THIS WORLD

The "...gods of this world blind the minds of them that believe not" in Jesus Christ.² My gods were alcohol, sex and worldly music that I believed could bring satisfaction to my soul. These lusts and vices kept the glorious gospel from shining in my heart to give the knowledge of Christ.³ Plus, the consequences of my actions produced emotional, mental, financial and physical pain for myself and others.

There were several "defining moments" in my teenage years. I had a defining moment when I took my first sip of beer at fourteen with a football-team member named Mike. Another when I experienced my first sexual experience. And others when I made certain rock-music singers my idols. I put faith in these pleasures and philosophies of those who partook in them with me. These were all defining moments that led to my downfall, events that defined who I became.

I was medicating the root of something much deeper. I had a tremendous fear of failure, being too lazy to work and study to make the grade. The more of a failure I became, the more I drank and ran wild. As this cycle of failure continued, I medicated the pain. After my Junior year in college, I decided to run away from my fears by moving to California. Have you ever felt you could get away from your problems by changing locations? I took my fear of failure out west with me. It was my fearful heart that defined me!

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

The summer of 1967 was a defining moment in my life. In California, I found even more medication for my pain, specifically marijuana. The day I smoked my first joint was a defining moment. That first smoke led to stronger drugs, such as hashish. I was high on dope, low on hope, divided, polluted, deluded and

sick with fear, yet still not broken. I was driven by a fear of failure and judgment.

The night I picked up one of the Beachboys hitchhiking was a defining moment. He introduced me to Charles Manson. They were taking psychedelic drugs, so I took them to be accepted by my new friends. I had failed in California, but who cared since I was accepted. But with Manson, acceptance came at a price. As time went on, more and more was demanded of me, and eventually, I was willing to give my all to please him, even my life.

It was a defining moment when Manson asked me to kill for him. In my book "Will You Die For Me?", I go into detail. I owed him a debt (he explained he had taken care of a problem of mine), and this would pay for it. As crazy as his philosophy was, it all seemed to make sense, since he taught, "no sense makes sense." After the senseless murders, I saw that by believing a lie I had caused a terrible loss of life and horrible pain for a multitude of people. The thing I greatly feared came upon me -- failure expressed by anger.⁴ It left me with deep remorse and regret, and a heart broken over the pain caused to others. What had I done?

DEFINING MOMENTS ANEW

County jail was a bad experience, but a defining moment. I became deeply depressed and strapped to a bed with a feeding tube in my nose at 106 pounds. In a catatonic state, a bright light appeared assuring me that whether I lived or died I belonged to the Lord. A tremendous peace came all over me, assuring me that everything was going to be all right. It felt like liquid love. I ended up on death row. The death penalty was overturned nine months later, and I was sent to a far better prison with a life sentence.

One defining moment after another begin to happen during the next two years. I was not looking for the Lord, but He was looking for me, because I was broken. My mother never stopped writing about God's love. I overheard a girl in the visiting room sharing John 3:16 with her boyfriend. My mother wrote Chico Holiday and Chaplain Ray who came to visit me in the prison chapel. Christians started reaching out to me both in and outside of prison. I started going to chapel services and on the last night of a week-long revival, I went forward to receive Christ. It was a defining moment when I returned to my room that night and looked in the mirror to see my face glowing. I was ten times higher than I had been on drugs. The seed sown in my broken heart had

taken root. My past no longer defined who I am because of Christ.

I didn't understand it then, but I had become a new creation, old things had passed away, all things had become new.⁵ I was regenerated that night by the Holy Spirit.⁶ I found out that because of the blood of Christ, I had been forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness.⁷ Christ took the punishment for my sin so that I would be declared righteous before God in Christ.⁸ It was so wonderful to know that God would not show partiality, and that the blood of Christ was able to overcome all I had done in the past, could do in the present and would do in the future.⁹ It was God's love that empowered me to overcome all of my fears.

LIFE GOES ON INSIDE

There have been many defining moments during my life in prison, moments designed by God to witness or divine appointments. I see it as a defining moment every time someone comes to Christ by surrendering their life to Him. This could be your defining moment by receiving Christ's sacrifice for your sins and His righteousness for you. What a privilege it is to share this good news with you. I pray that you too will soon believe in Christ and receive the gift of eternal life.

As a believer, your life would be fulfilled because we reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.¹⁰ Then you will begin to grow to experience God's abundant life. As the Apostle Paul wrote from prison, "God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."¹¹ Those who believe are deeply blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places.¹² We know that we have a better and enduring reality in heaven.¹³

I dare not speak of specific blessings in Christ that I have received personally in this life. They are a mere glimpse of the rewards that awaits the believer. Heaven will be the home of the redeemed, and the only prerequisite is that you be thirsty and believe. Nothing on earth satisfies... not wealth, fame, pleasure, or possessions. There is only one thing that can quench the deep thirst of the soul, and that is God Himself. He desires to be your God, and you to be His son or daughter. There will be continual excitement, discovery, anticipation, gratitude, praise, and the joy of being a partner in an eternal adventure with God Himself.¹⁴ The most important choice you will ever make is eternal life.

A FINAL THOUGHT

WATCH OUT! Choices bring forth defining moments in life. They come from the choice of the neighborhood we live, the school or church we attend, the people we meet and the influences of friends and family.

Ideally, our relationships with God is to define our every choice in life, assuring divine moments led by the Holy Spirit. Remember to pray, because every choice results in a consequence, whether good or bad. I know, we reap what we sow.¹⁵ Start today, choose life by sowing good!

Ultimately, we must be ready to accept responsibility for our every choice. Treat every choice as if it were the last. Live in the presence of God, His will and view of things. He will lead us into all truth; even divine appointments.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path." (Psalms 119:105, NKJV).

Here is a prayer that you may wish to pray:

"Heavenly Father, in the Name of Jesus, I present myself to You. I am so sorry for my sins and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe Your Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross to pay for my sins. I want to be born-again and become a new creature in Christ. Right now, I ask You, Jesus, to come into my heart. Please change my life and make it pleasing to You. Amen."

Our Web site presents to you the beauty of God's Word. We suggest, especially to those who are new Christians, to obtain a New Living Translation Bible (Tyndale House Publishers), at their local Bible book store. It is clear and precise in sharing the simplicity of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Won't you draw near to God today?

Scripture References:

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| 1. Matt. 13:1-23 | 8. 2 Cor. 5:21 |
| 2. 2 Cor. 4:4a | 9. Rom. 3:25 |
| 3. 2 Cor. 4:4b, 6 | 10. Rom. 5:17 |
| 4. Job 3:25 | 11. Eph. 3:20 |
| 5. 2 Cor. 5:17 | 12. Eph. 1:3 |
| 6. Titus 3:3-7 | 13. Heb. 10:34b |
| 7. 1 John 1;7-9 | 14. Rev. 21:6b-7 |
| | 15. Gal. 6:7, 8 |

DEFINING MOMENTS IDENTIFIED IN LIFE

Message from a former
Manson Family member

Defining moments are times when decisions were made that defined our lives with either positive or negative consequences. By identifying these, we become more effective in sharing our testimony in Christ with others.

Likewise, defining moments are found throughout the Scriptures, such as the scarlet thread of redemption that brought forth payment for sin and salvation to the world through Jesus Christ.

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