

I accepted Christ on July 5th 2006 while at DCLA. I wasn't clear on what I needed to do exactly so I went forward the following Sunday (July 9th) where Pastor Greg prayed with me and I stood in front of the church.

I remember being in this large room in DC surrounded by 1,000's of students and listening to David Crowder lead worship. He was singing "The Wonderful Cross." I remember reflecting on the words and thinking about honoring Jesus. What I associated with Christ in that moment was He died for me and that He sacrificed himself for me and I remember thinking that this was such a selfless act of love. We had been working our way through the book of John and one of the speakers highlighted specifically in 3:16 the word "so." That God so loved. That "so," although on its own is not much of a word, but placed in this verse, created this extraordinary meaning and emphasis on God's determination to show us all how much He truly loves us.

While we were singing "The Wonderful Cross," I also had one of my seeds blossom that taken root in my heart a few years prior. I had actually gone to see the "Passion of the Christ" a couple years with the youth group at Castine. I didn't start coming to Castine until a couple of years later. I recall feeling moved during and after the movie and seeing others in tears. I remember feeling confused and honestly not clear as to what I had just watched. I believed at that time that what I saw was true. I don't ever recall having doubt in Jesus's sacrifice and His life, but I didn't truly understand what it meant and what His sacrifice was for. At that time, I didn't feel that was for me.

Fast forward 2 years and listening to the words "oh the wonderful cross, bids me come and find that I may truly live." Love so amazing so divine. Demands my soul, my life my all."

I remember feeling and flashing back to the visuals from the Passion. And connecting what the words of the book of John that had been spoken during the conference sessions and now standing in this room full of thousands worshipping together and all I could think was God so loved me. That Jesus so loved me. That He died for me. That all I needed to do was accept this free gift. That I had nothing to give Jesus but simply my heart and that this was enough. And to not accept this was to me was not honoring to Jesus. That He paid the price for me, and I didn't want death to be vain because I didn't make the choice to follow Him.

My journey with how I managed to get to DCLA started several months prior. I was in my sophomore year at Arcanum. I was still trying to figure out me. My best friend had moved away going into my sophomore year, so I found myself bouncing around different groups of friends trying to figure out what seemed to fit. I hung out with a variety of individuals as I was involved and participated in a lot of extracurriculars. One thing I will note is I often morphed into the group I was with. I would try to follow the group or do what I thought the group would expect me to do.

One day at lunch, I was talking with some girls and my friend Kelly had been talking about a recent trip to El Camino in Greenville. Others at the table had gone too and seemed to have enjoyed their time. I felt left out so I said next time you go let me know. Since there was a group that seemed to frequent here after their church service, this was what Kelly suggested I do to go the next time. So there was a plan made to go for lunch to the Mexican restaurant the next Sunday after church. Start of a chips and salsa ministry 😊

So the following Sunday, I went to church. We met at Kelly's house and carpoled to Castine. I also attended Sunday school and Kelly's brother in law Justin was actually teaching the lesson. I remember seeing several people I knew from school in class and others that I knew once going to church. And Pastor Brian. There's so much I could say about Pastor Brian and his influence in my life early in my walk with Christ.

I remember Pastor Greg preaching. I'm pretty sure I sat in the front row as well with the other senior high students. I remember thinking that this church felt different. I hadn't spent much time in church prior to this. I'd been to the Methodist church my grandparents attended and a couple others, but Castine felt different to me. Pastor Greg preached in a different way that I felt engaged and generally understood what he was talking about. I felt curious.

After the service and some substantial fellowship time after as I later found to be incredibly common, we headed to El Camino.

This first trip turned into many more. Along with my visits to Castine and after a few weeks Wednesday night youth group at the VanCulins which ironically is now my in-laws 🙄.

I remember being in this place where I was meeting some new people. Some of them were older than me either still in high school or had graduated within the past few years. They didn't know me completely. They didn't know my struggles or the perceptions that others had of me that. I had a clean slate. Here I had entered my sophomore year in a really confused state. Ultimately wanting to find myself and be myself and in comes a request for some chips and salsa and I find myself in a place of comfort, great company, and a curiosity I couldn't shake.

I remember being at Castine when I had Pastor Greg pray with me on July 9th. I remember by friends and newer friends coming to give me hugs and congratulate me. Calling me their sister and others in the congregation coming to greet and congratulate me.

I haven't noted much about my parents in this testimony yet. I went home after church and was going to head to Fourmans as this is where the group was going to be and where I had found myself about every weekend learning to play Mexican train and beating them in a game of

euchre. This is where I wanted to be. In a place with people who understand what I had just recently made the decision to do.

I don't remember many conversations with my parents prior to this time about why I was going to church. I went to the DCLA conference that they approved for me to go on but I had to pay for myself. When I went home and then stated I was going to be going to Fourmans, there was a bit more of a conversation or rather confrontation. This was definitely the start of more challenges at home for several months as there was not an equal yoking. That I was in a different place than my own parents. I remember my mom saying that I was more bubbly and excited and she didn't understand why I wanted to keep going to church. I remember getting upset because I felt like they weren't supportive and they didn't want me to continue to go. I don't remember all that was said but I do remember telling them that I had given my life to Christ. That I had accepted Jesus. I didn't expect them to understand but to love me and my choice to be filled with joy and love and that I made this decision as I felt that it was honoring to do.

A few months later, Pastor. Brian had gotten connected with a young worship artist (Jason Patchett) who was going to be coming to Castine to lead worship on an upcoming Sunday. Prior to this I had actually been singing on Sundays with the worship team. I think this started after I helped with the Sunrise service of which I sang a song with a group. Now to back this up a second, this wasn't anything I'd ever done before. I was in band but I wouldn't fancy myself a singer. I sang all the time but that was in my car or to backstreet Boys in my bedroom growing up.

So here I am occasionally singing on the church worship team and learning how to harmonize and learning new songs which by this point I already either owned or had made multiple cds that included TobyMac, Crowder, Newsboys, Matthew west, Jeremy camp and many others. Anyways, somehow it came up for discussion that this artist was coming to our church and I made the comment, what if some of us that had been singing on worship would sing with this guy. And Pastor Brian supported it. Now secretly I was scheming. As I knew this would be a way to get my parents to come.

To my parents, this would almost be like a performance. It wasn't for me as I had grown to develop a strong connection with Jesus in music. However, for my parents, just like 100's of other games or performances that I had completed previously, I knew they would come.

And they did.

And they kept coming back.

I'll let you connect with them sometime for them to share their testimony but spoiler alert, they

are saved. My mom came to Christ that December and my dad a few years later. My parents also helped to lead their parents to Christ. My mom's dad accepted Christ at one of Castine's Christmas Eve services. My dad prayed with my grandparents one evening in their home. It was a rather interesting change in events that happened that evening and essentially my dad became so overcome by the Holy Spirit for his parents to accept Christ that my parents and I ended up going to their house late in the evening for my dad to kneel on his knees in front of them asking them questions about what Christ meant to each of them.

This of course baffled my mom and I as we were confused with my dad because we thought he was still wrestling with God.

In the spring of 2010, my aunt and uncle came to Castine. I don't remember if we were doing something as a family that day but I was singing worship again. We were closing worship with another David Crowder song, How He Loves. It is such a powerful song and I was overwhelmed by the spirit while on stage singing that song.

After the sermon, I remember going up to the stage and I could feel the Holy Spirit moving. I was anxious I anticipated if what He was at work doing. I don't remember the last song we sang, as I didn't sing much of it because once we started my aunt and uncle moved out of their church pew and I met them at the front with Pastor Greg to pray and they accepted Christ.

As far as influencing others in Christ now I would say my closest people would be my daughters—Caroline (7) and Eleanor (5).

Where I am seeking to impact others for Christ now is through work and the relationships I've grown there. As a nurse manager, I have had a lot made a lot of connections with others and have built new relationships. In particular during the pandemic, I was the nurse manager for a COVID unit and here I developed a lot of new relationships that are deeply rooted in traumatic experiences. Some of these relationships still exist today. There is a shared trust and bond that was formed with several individuals. I feel called to be in a leadership position in healthcare and strive to lead in a way that reflects Jesus and helps to show love and Grace to others like Christ has done for each of us.