

When I use to hear people give their testimonies about how they were raised in the church, and accepted Jesus as their Savior at a young age and how their parents were good, devout Christians who helped them learn to love the Lord with all their heart, I felt a tiny tinge of jealousy, that my testimony couldn't be like that; or perhaps, that my life couldn't have been like that.

Unfortunately, I was not raised in a good Christian home. I am the 7th of 8 children and my earliest memories were not happy ones. Growing up in an alcoholic family situation does not make for a lot of tender memories. In fact, life with alcoholics is traumatic enough that there are people all over this world searching for ways to mend their broken hearts and overcome their childhood experiences. (I'm here to testify, that God can and will overcome whatever circumstances we may have had in our life.)

When I was 8 years old I was taken to church by my older sisters where I accepted the Lord as my Savior. I fought throughout my teenage years to be a "good " Christian, I went to church whenever I could. I memorized scripture, I even witnessed and led other teenagers to Christ. However, I continuously battled between what I knew God wanted for me and surrendering to the daily battle, chaos and dysfunction that was my home life.

On my 18th birthday, I finally gave up the battle. I turned my back on God, church and home. I joined the Army to escape it all and continued running from my God and my life for years. I'll spare everyone a detailed list of my sins, except to say that there were many for many years.

At that time, I thought that living a Christian life meant giving up all my sins, voluntarily changing my life, and turning over a new leaf. In others words, in my mind, I had to WORK at keeping my salvation. All these were things I thought I had to do; I didn't realize yet that salvation is based not on what we do, but on what Jesus did!

I found I could not keep on being a "good " Christian because I was depending on my own power, instead of that of the Holy Spirit! All of our efforts to do right and live right are futile without the power of the Holy Spirit. We have to live in the Spirit to be able to live a Christian life.

My spiritual life went on for 25 years this way. I would fall away from the church for long periods, and then would return, usually when faced with some crisis or another and it really saddens me, because now I realize how much I and my children missed during those periods away from God.

I returned to Church and my Christian life again after a 17 year marriage ended. At that time I had 2 boys growing up fast and neither knew the Lord and I realized that it was my job to share the Lord with them. I can tell you truthfully, my life has never been the same. God has blessed me in so many ways.

It is so fortunate that God sees our innermost heart and knows what our intentions really are. Although I stumbled and fell so many, many times over the years, He never once took His hand away from me. No matter what I did, He kept bringing me back to Him, each time revealing a little more of His love to me, and making me understand a little bit more about my salvation, and His plan for my life. And in spite of my failures, God has brought my two children into the fold, they too have accepted Jesus as their Savior.

I still stumble in my Christian walk as I learn to rely on the Holy Spirit to lead me, guide me, and keep me from sin; and as I grow to love God more and more, I find I stumble less and less. It's only when I take my eyes off Jesus, and try to rely on my own ability, that I slip and fall. However, I have God's assurance that He will never forsake me. I Know He is going to do what He says He will! I thank Him so much, because He is always faithful and true, even when I am not.

Things in my life aren't perfect, but I Know, because God told us in His Word, that everything is somehow going to work out for good, because I love the Lord. Once again, I have His promise!

God bless, *Michele Herdlevan*