

Discovering Myself

Here we are, just a few weeks before my senior year in high school. Our school decided to let a revival come in to help start the school year in our county. I cannot remember who spoke, played music, or even much of the speaking. But I can remember the movement I felt, and the fire lit under my rear end by the end of that week. I still have the t-shirt some 30 years later; it stated "Body piercing changed my life." It had a silhouette of Jesus on the cross with the nails driven through. A simple but powerful image. That whole week was geared towards salvation, rededication, and learning how the rubber meets the road, kind of thing for many people.

One of the last nights, I remember being so moved that I knew something in me had to change. I claimed salvation earlier in life, but I rarely lived it. I knew of God, but I didn't really know Him. Salvation is more than a get-out-of-hell-free card. It is a relationship with God. We treat God like a drive-thru, barking our orders and getting impatient if we must pull forward to wait for a few minutes to get our answers. God is more than that and deserves more than that. That night on the way home, I asked my mom to pull over and let me out of the car.

We lived in a small town and were only a few miles from home. With it being late, there was hardly any traffic where we lived. My mom drove on, and I started walking. Tears in every step, that night I promised to God I'd do better. I must do better. I wanted a real relationship with Him. Truly get to know God and not just claim that I do. I walked and prayed all the way to the door of our house. All the way up the stairs and straight to bed. Call it true salvation or a rededication, it does not matter to me. After that night my life changed. My heart slowly started to understand "knowing" Him.

In Acts chapter 9, we look at this guy named Saul. Saul was a bad guy, like really bad. He would lead the way in killing many Christians to the point a lot of people knew his name and feared it. Saul is walking down the road heading to do some bad things, and then God enters his picture. I encourage anyone to actually go and read chapter 9, so you can see the change that happens in his life. Saul loses his eyesight for a couple of days until verse 18: 18 Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. I am not trying to say that I was like Saul and tried to kill people. But my heart was wicked, and that night on the road in that little town, I truly felt that I could see things differently. I was finally ready to desire God and have a true relationship with Him.

Now remember, if you have been following along in previous blogs, I do not have an earthly father figure in my life, and I have no clue what a father's love looks like. But I soon started realizing what God's love looks like. If you have ever watched NCIS, there is a character named Gibbs. Many times, he would "Gibbs" smack someone on the back of their head to get their attention and help teach them something. I began to realize the back of my head was sore from God's "Gibbs" smacking moments in my life.

My senior year finally gets started, and I have this new fresh look on life. Almost like a spring in my step. I'm finally trying to be a nicer person, cleaning up my act. Was I perfect at this? Definitely not. I still stumbled a lot and struggled when I was tested in life. As I go through my senior year, I try to dig deep and figure out who I was. All I knew was that I wanted to know God more. I got involved in more Bible studies, helping and serving in our church more, and even at one point helping lead devotional-type groups from time to time.

One day at my home church, I felt like God was calling me into ministry. I was excited and scared. I ended up standing before the church, as a senior in high school, and asked for mentorship. Crickets are all I heard. Now granted, I did have a couple of guys stand up and say they would help. But they had no clue what to do. I could even hear it in their voices. It's sad that in most churches that is a huge struggle; mentorship or discipleship is a lost skill. I would go on trying, on my own in many ways, to figure out how to grow in Christ. I did have some people that helped encourage me, but never in that scriptural kind of way. I will always remember our neighbor at that time. She was a sweet lady, laughed loudly, and walked fast. She would help encourage me, share wisdom, and give me my first teaching moments. She would let me fill in for her middle school Sunday school class from time to time. She taught me many things, even how to walk quickly with a cup of coffee. I consider that lady family, and always will.

As my senior year wraps up, people begin to notice changes in me. I can even notice changes in myself. I don't say or do things like I used to. I started working a job at a horse farm and doing landscaping on the side. I'm growing mentally, spiritually, and physically all during this time. There are still issues to deal with like bills, depression, and what's next in life. I'm slowly growing into a young man in a world of ups and downs. I would, at this time, start picking up on what I call "snapshot moments." These are random moments that I would see maybe in other people's lives or experience in my own life; like a father playing ball with his kid, or when you learn to go get your first horse from a field, you would file those memories away somewhere in your brain.

Those 'snapshot moments' became like pieces of a puzzle, helping me understand what it means to be a man, a friend, a follower of Christ. Even without an earthly father to guide me, I was slowly piecing together my own definition of manhood, one guided by faith, service, and those glimpses of love and connection I witnessed along the way. Senior year was just the beginning of that journey, a journey I'm still on, still learning, still growing, and still collecting those precious snapshots.