

Our Story/ God's Story: Britan

Following our discussion on unity, we want to further strengthen our teams and love for one another by sharing each of our journeys to come to Christ and live a life striving to know Jesus and follow His call on our lives. Over the next few weeks, you will hear from us in the US, and some of your colleagues, about their journey of faith and what it means for us to love and follow Jesus.

This week we will begin with my story. My name is Britan and I've worked with ILF for just about 9 years. I was born to Christian parents who brought us to church each week. I accepted Jesus as my savior at a young age without really understanding what I was doing. I lived a life that pleased my parents and my community without any real understanding of Jesus or why I was a Christian. I was a Christian simply because my family was. We call this being a cultural Christian. When we believe in our faith simply because we are told to or those around us are.

What was I missing? I was missing the relationship that comes with being a Christian. This is what separates us from just a religion right? It is not just a group of practices, customs or rules to follow, it's a relationship with our savior. It was not until I was 17 that I turned from following a religion to following Jesus and building a relationship with him. I was baptized in a lake near my home and have tried to follow Him ever since.

This is not because I follow a list of rules or even because following the Christian faith is going to make my life better. I have learned to follow him simply because I love Jesus and want to honor him with my life. In John 15:4–5, Jesus tells us, *"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."* When I first started following Jesus, I realized how easy it is to confuse religious activity with true spiritual fruit. You can do all the "right things..." go to church, serve, even be missional... and still not have the powerful life of Christ flowing in you if you aren't truly connected to Him.

Jesus uses this picture of the vine and branches because it's so clear: branches look alive for a little while even after they aren't connected to the vine, but eventually, they dry up. That's how I felt when I was just being a "cultural Christian." I looked alive from the outside, but I wasn't rooted in Him.

Fruit; things like love, joy, peace, patience which we find in Galatians 5:22–23, these don't come from trying harder, they come from abiding in Him. Abiding means staying close, depending on Him daily, listening to His voice. That's where real life and strength come from.

Now, as many of you know, following Jesus does not mean that life will be easy, it means that whatever trials we face, He will be with us and give us guidance and peace. That has been my experience.

This was true in my life when I've struggled with some significant health issues, the death of close family members or struggled with things like anxiety, pride, or doubt. We have talked quite a bit as ILF teams about the need for us to be in the Bible, to be spending significant and purposeful time in prayer and be in community with one another. That is where we can hold each other accountable, lean into each other and grow from each other. We share this because it has been proven true in our lives. When we struggle with doubt, lust, or greed, when we struggle with loss or betrayal, we can look to the Bible for an appropriate and godly response. We can pray to our Heavenly Father to help us and we can lean into each other to find encouragement and accountability. Friends, this is how we grow in our faith and resist the enemy. As I've grown in my faith, I've seen time and time again, God's hand and sovereignty over situations because of this truth. I can lean into my brothers and sisters through ILF and seek wisdom. This has been a great encouragement in my life.

My story is simple: I went from religion to relationship. From following rules to following Jesus. And I wouldn't trade that relationship for anything. This is why I am a Christian, and also the reason I work with Impact A Life Foundation, with you all. I want to experience the richness of relationship with Jesus in my life, and as a result, I want to share that with you, and the world around me, and I desire greatly for you all to experience the same in YOUR lives.

As we go through this series, I want to encourage us all to remember: what makes our stories powerful isn't how "good" we look on the outside, it's how deeply we know Jesus on the inside. We would love to hear from you as we go through this series. Did anything stand out to you? Anything you'd like to comment on or as about our lives? Sound good?

Prayer

"Jesus, thank You for loving us enough to call us into a relationship with You. Thank You for being patient when we've gone through the motions, and for drawing us closer to Your heart. I pray that as a team, we'll not only serve You but truly walk with You. Let our stories point others back to You. Amen."