

Our Story/God's Story: Amy

- God has graciously brought and continues into bring people to my life to support and grow my life-long faith.
- “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Hello brothers and sisters in Christ! I am so excited about this series of testimonies that we get to share together. Thank you, Britan, Micah, and Cyrus, for sharing your stories, and for encouraging us all! Today I get to share my testimony with you. I pray that as I share my story, it would serve to remind you of God's gracious work in your life, specifically how God has brought people into your life to support and grow your faith, too.

Two women play a huge role in the beginning of my testimony, and, because of that 2 Timothy 1:5 has a special place in my heart. Here, as Paul is writing to Timothy, he begins his encouragement by remembering who brought Timothy to that point in his life. Paul says, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.” My mother and grandmother were also a big reason I came to faith! That grandmother's name was also Lois and, to be open, we were not close, BUT she was an example of faith in my life, and the work she did with an organization called Child Evangelism Fellowship is what led me to asking Jesus to be my savior.

I was four years old, my dad was the pastor of a church that, by God's grace, was full of people who told me about Jesus from such an early age that I don't remember a time when I did not know Jesus loves me. The older I get, the more I appreciate this incredible gift. And while I knew Jesus loved me, reading a letter from CEF and doing the activities with my mom was the first time I remember hearing about God's rescue plan for me – that I needed Jesus' gift of salvation in order to be in his love forever. Again, by God's grace, even at only four years old, I could see that my bad choices, my sin, made me far from God, and I didn't want that! I remember clearly thinking, “Why has no one ever told me this before?!” Praying to ask Jesus into my heart felt so urgent that I couldn't even wait a short amount of time for my dad to get home from work so he could pray with me, too!

Fast forward and here we are - I am 40 years old and have never left my faith. Not that I've never had any doubts. I just didn't walk away when I wondered or faced hard times. Again, the older I get, the more I appreciate this as incredible gift from God. I truly believe I have been able to continually walk in faith because God brought many kind and generous and loving and faithful people into my life.

I want to take a moment to name some of these people. You are not going to know who they are (except for maybe Phil, my dad, who visited Sierra Leone with ILF earlier this year) but I want to honor them and how God worked in their lives to bring them to a point where they could support me and others in faith. Maybe some names of important people in your life will come to your mind while I do. Phil and Jennifer Kirsch, Lois Kirsch, David and Susan Thomas, Ardis Updike, Jim and Elmolene Jones, June Lindstad, Daniel Andres, Laura Cochran, Karen Newbill, Bethann, Shelly Schmor, Natahsa Valach, Jane Schmidt, Jackie Randolph, Becca Huff, Leone Trussell, Emily Bingham, Mandi Duggan, Carmen Imes, Cindy Bell. These are many of the people God worked through to guide me in his ways from childhood and up to my 40's.

When I was a kid, it was some of these people who had fun with me and loved me and taught my Sunday School classes at church. When I was a teenager it was some of these people who gave me hope and encouraged me when friends at school were unkind to me and didn't include me. When I was a young adult it was some of these people who spurred me on to grow in my faith and in the gifts God gave me. When my life went through many changes and challenges – becoming a wife, job disappointment, becoming a mom, moving on from the church I grew up in, raising young children, living through a global pandemic – it was some of these people who continually pointed me back to the hope and joy of the gospel. Often it was just their presence and example, sometimes it was a specific conversation, other times it was a commitment to leading a group I was a part of. Even now, God continues to bring amazing people into my life.

I realize not everyone's story may include this depth of support. To encourage you, I would say, listen to the Holy Spirit when he nudges you to connect with people. There was a time God knew I would need a new friend at church because my best friend would be moving far away soon, and as always, He knew what I would need even before I did. Philippians 4:19 says, "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." I have seen this promise realized in my life through the people God has placed in my

path. One Sunday he prepared the way for a new friendship, but he asked me to participate in his provision. We had a guest worship leader and I very clearly felt the Holy Spirit nudge me to go say hi and thank her for leading us. I knew it was not from me since I don't usually feel comfortable doing something like that. That moment was the start of a friendship God used in so many ways – fun, encouraging, convicting, healing – and it all started with a small act of trust and obedience.

Another way I want to encourage you is to find someone – or a few people – you can intentionally commit to with God's help. Whether it be simple friendship, working partnership, or spiritual accountability, make the decision to regularly encourage one another and build each other up. By God's grace, I have been studying the Bible weekly with the same group of ladies for about 20 years. The group has sometimes expanded, and sometimes shrunk for a season, but the core of us have intentionally committed to setting aside one night a week to study together and lift one another up. I know the gift of being a part of a small group of believers has made a difference in my life. It's in this group that I have experienced the blessing of Psalm 1:

1 Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,
2 but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.

I have seen the blessing of committing to spending time with people who gather to delight in God's word and encourage one another. I am less fearful knowing I am not alone, I am stronger when they lovingly challenge my thinking, I'm encouraged as we cheer each other on, I gain deeper faith as I hear their stories of faith, when my hope feels weak theirs helps to fill the gap. In a world where it's easy to let individual desires dominate our attention, I know God has helped us make this group a priority and he has blessed us.

When I look back and see how God has been good to me and led me through my life of faith, I think of 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 where it says, "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." These verses remind us who God is (giver of salvation, reliever of suffering), who we are (meant for life together with Jesus and

others), and what we should do (encourage, build up). I'm so grateful so many people in my life understand these things.

None of us come to salvation in Christ completely on our own, and, I am guessing, none of us came to Impact a Life Foundation completely on our own either. I am here, speaking with you today, in general, because of God's gracious work in my life. But, more specifically I'm here speaking with you today because Cyrus Mafi took the time to encourage me and gave me an opportunity to use my God-given gifts to help spread the word about God's good work through ILF. And though I don't know all of your stories (yet), I am sure there is someone who told you about ILF or invited you to participate as well.

I am so grateful to God for bringing so many kind and generous and loving and faithful people into my life. May God give us all eyes to see the encouragers he places in our paths, to stand firm in the faith knowing we're not alone, and may we follow his good leading to do the same for others!