

He Calls Me *HIS* Friend!

During my early childhood years, I was raised in a very devout, catholic home, with my mother, father and two brothers. My parents were very involved...Church, every Sunday, confessional every month, and rosary every day. I attended a catholic school with a statue of Mary in one corner and a statue of Joseph in the other corner of each classroom. In the middle, over the chalkboard, there was a small Crucifix. God to me was some great and distant judge, someone to be feared, someone to tremble at, certainly not a friend. I was taught that Jesus Christ had opened the gates of heaven, but essentially it was only by my works that I was going to get through them. I was like many children then, happy and carefree, but at the age of eight, I would have an experience that would change my life forever.

That summer, while my family and I were vacationing in Kentucky. We were involved in a tragic car accident that claimed the lives of my entire family, everyone except me! Although I survived the crash, I was critically injured. I was left in a coma and suffered a collapsed lung and a compound fracture with severe nerve damage to my left arm. The doctors gave a grim diagnosis of my outlook. They predicted, that if I were to survive, I would suffer severe and lasting brain damage as well as the loss of my left arm. The chances for my survival, however, were so slim that on the headstone bearing the names of my now deceased family, a single blank space was left for one other name...mine!

Even in those dismal moments, the Lord had his hand on me, though I certainly didn't see it at the time. Through all of this, an elderly lady, a complete stranger who had read about the accident, had felt led to pray for me daily and even sent bible stories to me while I was recovering, up till I was about 10. I feel certain that the Lord's answers to her continuous prayers have followed me for a blessing throughout my entire life!

Unfortunately, my parents had not made out a will or guardianship, so when I was released from the hospital, I was temporarily sent to live with an aunt with 3 children of her own. We all got along as normal children do, however, there was the occasional, subtle indication that I wasn't part of the family and I didn't belong there.

Finally after a lengthy recovery and many legal battles, I ended up living with my widowed grandmother and attended a catholic school. From the very start, I had an extremely difficult time adjusting to life with my grandmother. I was bitter, angry, depressed and lonely. To complicate matters, I soon began to develop seizures and in those days, there was very little treatment available. I would have as many as a couple of dozen partial seizures a day, which were quite noticeable to others. This made me the "laughing-stock" of my class. I was harassed relentlessly nearly every day by nearly everyone from my class. During all of this, I was in and out of countless meetings with therapists, teachers, and priests. Nothing helped. I became more bitter, angry and depressed. I felt like the world hated me and I felt betrayed and abandoned by God. I hated God and I hated myself, so by the time I was 13, I tried to kill myself twice. I couldn't even do that right. Looking back, I know the hand of the Lord was on me. In my pain and confusion, I cursed God, but I also began to pray to Him... not just with empty, memorized, repetitious prayers, but with sincere cries for help from my hurting, broken heart!

“But in my distress I cried out to the LORD; Yes, I called to my God for help. He heard me from his sanctuary...” – 2 Sam. 22:7

When I was 14 my grandmother became ill and died a short time later. Through several turns of events, I ended up living with an aunt and uncle who were very strict, and very atheistic, but I continued to cry out to the Lord – in private. Doors were opening up to me and my personal battles were less and less, though still far from over. More and more I searched for the Lord and more and more he revealed himself to me until one afternoon when I was 16, on my way home from school, I walked into a small college prayer chapel. I was fully determined that this would be the day that I would finally find the Lord, and it was! A young college student, who happened to be in there resting and praying between classes, approached me and boldly asked me this question... “If you were to die today, where would you spend eternity?”

Quite honestly, I knew very little about Jesus, and at that point in my life, I had no idea where I would spend eternity, but I wanted to know those answers more than anything and she began to share the word of God, (the Bible), with me. Most importantly...

Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me.” – John 14:6

From that day forward, I knew I would never walk alone, I would never again be without a father for the Heavenly Father would forever be there, waiting. That was the day that I learned I was not without a friend, for I had a friend in Christ Jesus, and he calls me friend...

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” – John 15:13-15

The very moment I accepted Jesus as my Lord and savior, I experienced a joy that I had never known. I was immediately delivered from the bitterness, anger, depression and thoughts of suicide. I began to crawl out of my shell and never looked back.

Many years have passed since that day and “...*the Lord has done great things for me...*” (*Psalms 122:6*). I have been wonderfully blessed with a family of my own; my precious wife and 5 beautiful children. I still have some seizures, but the Lord has used those to humble me, to answer *His* call into the ministry, to teach me to rely entirely on *Him* and not my own talents, and to help me follow where *He* will lead me.

Many times I have asked the Lord why I had to go through all that I did...Then, a few years back,

some friends were foster parents to a teenage girl from a troubled home. She became a ward of the state and was placed in several different foster homes. She was bitter, angry, and depressed. She felt alone, and she felt like she didn't belong. She felt like no one at the church understood her, because no one had "been there." Then, as I shared my testimony with her and she began to open up to me, we talked, we cried, we laughed and we prayed and that day, the Lord answered my question about why. God can turn *our* pain into *someone else's comfort*, and that gives real *purpose* and *joy* to our own lives, as *He* has done with *mine!*

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with his hand." – Psalms 37:23-24

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In HIS Love.....Dan C.