

HOW I FOUND JESUS

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I was born to two alcoholic parents. My dad was a 35-year-old lifer in the Navy, and my mom was on her third marriage. She was 42 when she married my father. My dad figured that because of marrying an older woman, he was never going to have children. Surprise! She got pregnant. They were both pretty hardcore-type drinking people. I was born six-weeks pre-mature, and weighed 4 ½ lbs. That was scary stuff in 1957! They put me in an incubator and waited to see if I would make it. My dad was raised in a Christian home, but as soon as he went into the military he left all of that behind him. When he saw me in that incubator, it shook him up and he began to look at his life differently. He asked the doctor what could be done and he said, "Mac, all we can do is pray."

So my dad started praying that I would make it. I was in the incubator for several weeks. By the end of that period my dad had gotten to the point to where he'd had made one of those contractual prayers. You know the type, "God, if you do this then I'll do that," kind of thing. His prayer was, "If you let my son live, I'll get my life straightened out and go back to church." So, obviously, God kept his end of the bargain and my dad and mom started going to a nearby church of Christ. Things went pretty well. Later, we were shipped over to the Philippines. Mom quickly became miserable there and so she started drinking again. Not too long after that my dad started drinking again.

A couple of years later our family was transferred to Central California. By this time I was 4 years old, and my parents could hardly stand each other and my dad became abusive. My mother

got to the point that she realized she was either going to kill my dad or was going to leave him. She didn't want to go to prison, and so she chose to leave. One day he came home from work, and everything in the house was gone except for his sea bag and personal items lying in the middle of the floor! We had no idea where he went.

We moved to Sacramento, and stayed with my sister for a while. There is a twenty-three year age difference between my older half-sister and me, and she already had three children. My mother and sister never could get along very well. Have you ever seen family members who were so much alike they couldn't stand each other for very long? We ended up moving out on our own in Sacramento, and that's where I grew up. My mom didn't a drink daily; she was a binge drinker. She would work and hold down a job, but on her days off she'd drink most of the time. When I was a young kid, I remember she'd bring these men home from work. It was always the same pattern. Some guy would follow her home from the restaurant at which she worked as a waitress. He would slip me some money and suggest that I head off to the movies and have a good time! Often he would say, "Hey Johnny, why don't you take your friends?" And that's what I would do. At first I thought that was great! It was a lot of money back then. We would go to the movies, eat all the popcorn and candy that we wanted, play and mess around at the arcade, and all that. Eventually I realized these guys were bribing me to be alone with my mom. I became very bitter about being unwanted.

But by the time I reached the age of 12, my mom's alcoholic behavior and the way she was sleeping with men was really starting to get to me. So, early in adolescence, I was already starting to develop some emotional problems. For example,

when I was a kid, I hated alcohol. I hated what my mom did on alcohol. I despised it when she got drunk as well as the way she would act and things she would say. I just hated it. Well, the next thing that happened, I really can't explain it. When I turned 13, I decided I wanted to see what getting drunk was about for myself. All my friends were talking about how much fun it was. So my best friend, Lee, and I decided to do it. We did the old trick, "I'll say I'm staying at your house and you say you're staying at my house," but we actually went down to the American River to spend the night and check out booze.

We took along a gallon of Vin Rose, a package of Oreos, and a couple sleeping bags. We went to our favorite river spot and started drinking. I don't remember a lot about that night, which was probably some kind of precursor for the rest of my days. I vaguely remember the two of us engaging in a vomit contest. The next morning, I was so hung over that I was drunk half way through the next day. Even though I was sick and felt bad, I still liked it. So, I began to drink as much as I could get, and by the time I was in my mid-teens, I was sneaking beers, getting people to buy stuff for me, and drinking on the weekends. At the time I had a "big brother" type of guy who was a heavy drinker. So at ages 15 through 18, I was getting drunk with him.

When I became a sophomore in high school, everybody was talking about drugs. I soon tried pot for the first time and I really liked that a lot better than alcohol. Marijuana soon became my drug of choice. So by the time I got out of high school, I was getting high every day, drunk every weekend, doing keg parties and everything else in between. You need to know that I really enjoyed it! Everyone I liked was doing it; even my friend's parents did it. I used to buy dope from them! It was just the culture of 70's California.

Now I need to help you understand that up until this point, I never got any religious training at home. My mom didn't talk about the Bible much, I never saw my momma pray, you could say that I was raised in a completely neutral environment. A lot of my friends were atheists. Their parents were atheists. And they were very, very influential on me when I was a teenager. I reached the point at which I despised Christians. I used to like picking on them. I would equip myself by reading magazine articles that denied God, would head off to school (or somewhere) and if I found someone that was a Christian then I had a field day. I liked getting them into a corner, and then I would nail them with questions to see how mad I could get them! For me, it was fun! It was disgusting is what it was!! "Hunting for Christians" was a sick sort of game I played. I bought into the Hugh Hefner philosophy, and then humanism, and I was set! No God was going to restrict my lifestyle.

My favorite teachings while growing up, was that "you can do what ever you want to", and "nobody can tell you what not to do!" There was a popular song that expressed this attitude in its lyrics, "Its Your Thing. Do What You Want to Do." But no one ever told me what the consequences were. So I went gung ho on whatever I felt like doing. Unfortunately, after "high" school (a good name for it) I couldn't get a job nor could I keep a job. My mom and I were definitely not getting along at all and so I left home and joined the Coast Guard.

In the Coast Guard, doing drugs is a huge "no no." The reason is that this branch of the military is basically the Drug Enforcement Agency at sea. However, alcohol was permissible; you could get drunk as much as you like. In fact they made it real affordable and easy to do just that. They provided a bar

called the Enlisted Men's Club and sold really cheap drinks because they did not want us to do drugs! So while I was enlisted I started drinking very heavy. Before I went into the service I thought I was a pretty tough guy (hanging around college types, keeping up with the big boys). But, when I got into the Coast Guard, I found out that these sailors knew really how to drink! I mean they drank all the time! They drank the heavy stuff: hardcore liquor. It was as though they had cast iron stomachs! These guys could drink me under the table! In those days I began to blackout a lot.

I finally ended up getting stationed in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. Now for a pagan guy from California, that was absolutely no place I wanted to be! It was so flat there that the only elevation in town was the railroad tracks! And right on the map, if you look north of Elizabeth City, you won't have to look far to find the Dismal Swamp. No kidding! I mean it was dismal! It was horrible! I did not like the place or the people. It was a military town, and back then everyone in the military had short hair. In contrast to this, guys outside of the military were wearing long hair. For that reason we stood out - they could spot us a mile away. There was extreme prejudice against Coasties there. None of the dads in Elizabeth City would let the sailors date their daughters. It was bad enough to be treated as second-class people, but we couldn't date anybody. Those were horribly lonely days! Because of this I partied even harder, was drinking heavily, and returned to doing drugs again. I started doing "recreational drugs," but I was so miserable, and I was so utterly, horribly depressed. It reached the point that when I was using more and more, I was enjoying it less and less. Every day was like a cloudy horizon; I never saw the sun shine. Every day was a drag. It seemed as if each day was worse than the day before, and so I drank a great deal more during that time,

to the point I was blacking out more and more. I was late to work; I was getting in trouble, and stuff. Then one afternoon we had a softball game, and I thought I'd be a big man and go in the club, the bar, and just order a pitcher of beer without a glass. That was the big macho deal back then. No glass, just a pitcher of beer! You know, I took my pitcher and sat down at a table in the corner of the bar with fellow friends of mine and just started drinking that pitcher of beer. I don't remember what happened, and to this day I still don't know what happened. But the next morning I woke up, and barely made a flight that I was scheduled to be on. I spent four miserable hours throwing up in the back of the plane, and when the plane landed they arrested me!

I was taken into the interrogation room, and they began to question me about the night before. I was asked, "Where were you, and what did you do after you left the club?" "Did you lend your car to anybody?" I couldn't remember anything, and so I bluffed as much as I could! I remember saying "No, no, no, I just went home, I went straight home!" I was then asked, "What time?" I replied, "About 10:15, you know." They asked, "Was anyone in the car with you?" My response was, "No." "Well, did you go anywhere on base and then go home?" "No, I just went off base!" This continued on for several hours, and my anger continued to build.

An enlisted man in the service has no legal "rights." As far as a serviceman is concerned, "Miranda" (as in Miranda rights) was a girlfriend in Tijuana. The MP's could do whatever they wished, and they continued to do so. They refused to tell me why I had been arrested, and would not tell me what was going on. The questions kept on coming, and it just served to make me even more frustrated! Finally I was given a break, and I

walked outside with the man that was heading the interrogation. I lit a cigarette, and we sat and talked for a period of time. Suddenly he said, "I would like to show you something." We walked out to the back, to the area in which impounded cars were stored. Sitting in among the impounded cars was my car! At the time I drove a 1965 Ford Galaxy 500, and it was a piece of junk! My buddies called it "the Sled."

We walked around to the passenger side of my car, and from the front fender to the end of the rear quarter-panel was this huge scrape! To make it even worse, I had no memory at all of how it happened! Finally I was told that I had sideswiped the bumper off the commander's car! You don't have to be in the military to know I was in huge trouble! The man that I hit was a high-ranking officer, "scrambled eggs" on his hat and everything, and I ripped the bumper right off his Thunderbird! I evidently continued on and ran over a stop sign! I flattened it! But the worst was yet to come.

As I barreled on down the road, I came upon a helicopter that was about to leave out on a search and rescue mission. It was crossing the road to go out to the runway and take off, and blue lights were flashing as to say to me, "Hey, stupid, stop! There's a helicopter trying to cross the road!" I didn't stop! I kept going, and the helicopter had to slam on the brakes and the rotor blades almost hit the ground! I was inches from causing a disaster and loss of life. The helicopter personnel were the ones who saw my car. They had no way of identifying me, but they could identify my ugly car! In spite of all this, somehow I managed to make it home.

Well, when my interrogator showed me my car, I turned white. The shore patrolman told me later that he thought that I was going to faint. This was an accurate assessment, because just

about 3 weeks before my incident a co-worker had been driving intoxicated on Highway 17. This resulted in an accident, and the death of a lady in the other car. As a result of that incident, he was sentenced by the state of North Carolina to 20 years of hard labor. This really shook me up!

The shore patrolman said, "You don't remember last night, do ya?" I was honest in my response, and said "No." He then said, "McCranie, you've got two choices. You can either be court-marshaled, we'll take a stripe, it will cost you about \$500, and you won't drive on base for about six months or go to sickbay and talk to one of the substance abuse counselors about your drinking. Which would one will it be?"

Well I might have been a drunk, but I wasn't stupid! I chose to go to the base hospital. I reclaimed my car, drove straight to sickbay and talked to the substance abuse counselors! After a four-hour interview he said, "John, you're an alcoholic!" It may be surprising but I wasn't surprised. I knew I was out-of-control. Even my drinking buddies were telling me to slow down. When this counselor said I was alcoholic it was as if he told me that I had cancer or something. So I said, so what's the cure? He said, "There is no cure. You will die an alcoholic!"

Man, if I wasn't depressed enough already. This was really starting to turn into a bad day! In one day I've been arrested, interrogated, and then sent to sickbay. Now I'm being told that I'm an alcoholic! Now I'm really depressed. I've asked for a cure, and there is no cure. You'll have it for the rest of your life. Wow! So I asked, "What can I do?" His answer was simple: sign up for alcohol rehabilitation. So that's what I did.

About a month later, I was shipped up to what they call "Dry

Dock." It was a 28-day in-patient treatment program, and was based on the 12 steps of AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). The first step is to accept that one's life is powerless as well as unmanageable because of alcohol. I had already made that step before I came into treatment. But while I was in treatment, they covered the second step. The second step is to come to believe in a power greater than oneself. This will restore one's life to sanity! So I said, "well, what is this greater power?" All of the guys in my counseling group session said, "It's God." Then I said, "WHAT?" In a rage I shouted, "Now wait just a minute! Am I not in a government-sanctioned facility right now? I mean, I've already been to the edge and back and now you're telling me that I have to believe in God? What about the separation of church and state?" I climbed up on my soapbox, and I just went on a rampage. When I finally got it all out of me, the group counselor said, "McCranie, why don't you just shut up! You don't know what you are talking about!" (Obviously I was not the first one that had come in with this attitude, and they knew how to deal with it). One of the guys then said, "All we are saying is that you have to believe in something or someone more powerful than alcohol." After awhile I finally started to get the gist of it (but just a little).

During treatment I reached that point that I believed that a higher power existed and his name was "God." Let me explain exactly what I mean by this statement. There are two different ways by which atheists come to believe in God. They come to faith in two different ways. One is that someone sits them down and intellectually, logically, and rationally proves the existence of God through reason, science and intellectual argument. The atheist becomes a believer after having been convinced through a greater truth. That is not why I became a theist. I became a believer in God because I needed one so badly. There are a lot

of people out there who say they don't believe in God. However, they will believe in God if they can be shown one who can help them out of their misery. That's why I became a believer, I finally admitted I was powerless.

By the time I got out of treatment, I had been sober for 30 days, or more. I felt really good. I had taken the third step of AA, which is to turn your life and your cares over to the will of God, as you understand him. I did that, and so when I had gotten out of treatment I was feeling really good! I was going to AA meetings every night, I got a sponsor, I was working the steps, I was doing everything they told me to do, because I knew I was going to be miserable if I didn't. I did not want to die a drunk. I was even told that if I continued to stay sober that I wouldn't be depressed anymore. This is what I desperately wanted so I seriously pursued sobriety.

For the next few months I was getting into it. I was going all-out, "gung ho" on this AA thing. For the next eight months I attended meetings and did everything they told me to do. During that time I got more involved in playing music, and started a rock band with a couple friends. Playing music was a type of "therapy" for me. I was sober for nearly a year. Everything was going great until one rainy Thursday evening. It was about 9 o'clock at night, and my AA sponsor knocked on the door. He'd walked the ten blocks from his house to my house in the pouring rain! I mean he was drenched! He knocked on the door of my house, and when I saw who it was I naturally invited him in. He said, "No John, I've got something to tell you." Naturally I was interested in hearing what he had to say. I'm certain that most people are not familiar with the role of an AA sponsor. A sponsor is there for you, and is someone in whom one can confide everything. I told him things that I had

never told anyone else. I shared with him the deepest, darkest hurts; the worst parts, the worst things I had ever done to anyone else in my life. I confided in him, because he was my sponsor!

Again invited him in and he said, "No, I can't do it, I have something to say." I asked, "What is it?" He said, "John, I'm bisexual and I'm starting to have feelings for you." I was repulsed! I told him, "If you ever even look at me or act like I exist, I'll have your pension, I'll have your retirement, and I will nail you! I will hurt you! He then walked back out into the rain.

I was shaken up quite badly! Then to make matters worse, within about a week of that bomb going off, my band broke up. Now I'm really hurting. Then I got scheduled on a last minute fill-in flight to this aviation school out in Tacoma, Washington, for C-130's. I wasn't slated to go, but some guy backed out and I ended up having to go. Being almost 3,000 miles from my support base, can you guess what I did? I got drunk! I got so drunk during that two-week school that I had to borrow money from the Red Cross to get back home! It felt as if I had never left the party scene.

When I got back into town, I went right back to my old destructive ways. People around me were saying, "What? I thought you weren't partying!" I would say something like, "Yeah, right" and then keep on partying. I was back into this pit for about six months, but this time it was different. When I was partying the first time I was miserable, but the second go-around was far more miserable than the first time. The first time I had no idea that I was an alcoholic. The second time I knew that I was an alcoholic, and here I had started drinking again. I had the worst self-image possible! You know you're killing yourself, and you still do it. As I said earlier, this continued on

for about six months. The bad thing about it was that the enjoyment of it was gone. AA had taken all the fun out of parties. All that I was doing was taking off the edge; there was no pleasure because of the guilt. Then I finally reached a point in my life (a crisis) in which I began to question my existence. I was asking questions such as, "Why I am here? Am I here just to poison and kill myself, or to just die?" I thought, "No, that's not why God made me! That's not what I'm here for!"

Not long after I had made this revelation, I was visiting in the home of my friend Dan. We used to get together to drink beer and watch The Three Stooges. Welcome to fun in Elizabeth City, N.C.! While we were drinking and watching the Stooges, a commercial about the Bible came on TV. Dan said, "You know what, I have one of those Bibles." I said, "No way! Get out of here!" Dan said, "Yes, I really do and it has my name on it. Would you like to see it?" I said, "I've got to see this, or there's no way that I'm going to believe it! He then showed it to me. It was a nice leather Bible, and his name was on the cover in gold. I said, "I can't imagine you reading the Bible." Dan turned to me and said, "You know, they gave me a hardbound version, as a "freebie" for buying this one. You want it?"

I said, "No, I tried reading the Bible, man, I can't get past the "thees" and "thous" and "cleave unto" and the other stuff, I don't know what it's talking about." He said, "No, this one is like reading the newspaper." Oh, really! So that night I took that Bible home, and the publisher suggested that a first-time reader should read the Gospel of Mark. So I looked it up in the index, turned to it, and started reading Mark. Now I have to admit that when I first started reading, I didn't believe the miracles. I did not believe that Jesus walked on the water, or that he could raise people from the dead. I'd read it and sarcastically say, "Yeah,

right." But found that I couldn't get what Jesus taught out of my mind. I'd be at work pushing a wrench on an airplane and thinking about what he'd said, such as "Treat other people like you want to be treated." I'd think, "Good grief, I should have done that, because if I had, I would have prevented a lot of heartache in my life."

So I continued to read, and I grew more and more excited. I began thinking that maybe this Jesus person is my higher power! I even started praying to Him! I asked Him to help me stay sober. I kept reading, and then I got almost to the end of the book, and do you know what they did to Him? They killed Him! His own people had him executed. He died! He's on the cross, and he's dead! After reading this I closed the Bible and said sarcastically, "GREAT! Wonderful! This is just like my own stinking life! Every time that I put my weight on someone they fall down on me! Every time I say, 'I need help,' those that are supposed to help me disappear!!" Any time that I've ever needed someone to help me out of my misery, that someone has taken advantage of me abused me or abused me. Now I've found Jesus Christ, and I start trusting that He just might be the answer, and now I've read that He's DEAD!

I got depressed! I was in a bad mood! I tossed and turned all night. The next day at work I was in a rotten mood. I went home that day, and when I got home from work, I looked and noticed that there was only about a page and a half left to the Book of Mark. So I thought that I'd go ahead and finish it; I like finishing books I've started. Guess what I read. Have you read it yourself yet? He didn't stay dead! I was in my room after finishing the Gospel and I was going "YEAH! YEAH!" Meanwhile my roommate was hearing what was going on. His last name Fish, and he drank like one. He's was sitting in his

chair with his Budweiser and his remote control, and he's watching cartoons. I walked in and said, "Kevin! He didn't stay dead!" He's replied, "What?" I said, "Jesus! He didn't stay dead; he came back from the grave! He's alive!" Kevin said, "John, get out of here." I wanted him to know too, and so I said, "No, I'm serious; you want to read it for yourself?" He said, "No, John. I'm serious, GET OUT OF HERE! I don't want to hear that #&\$*@\$#@*#!" I told him I was sorry he felt so angry about my discovery.

I was so excited! I kept thinking, "This is so great! This is so GREAT!" So I went back to the beginning of the Bible again. It read: "For those of you that are reading for the first time, we suggest that after reading Mark that you read the book of Revelation for a picture of the end times." Let me pause here and ask a question: Would you suggest that a person new to Scripture, someone that hardly knows anything about the Bible, read the Book of Revelation? Most would answer, no. I'd like to suggest you change your answer. Revelation is a fantastic book for the lost! Let me explain why.

Now I didn't understand the seven crowns, the ten heads, or the beast with the mark. I had no idea what that meant: the sea turning to blood, and seals being broken. But you know what? Although I didn't understand everything, but by time I got to the end I did get the message. The big picture is that God is coming back and there is either "this side or that side," and if you are on the wrong side, it's going to be really bad! It then dawned on me, that I didn't want to live sixty or seventy miserable years here on earth and then, have to go to an even more miserable place! I told myself, "There is no way I'm living a pathetic life and THEN going to hell! No way!"

Do you know what is so great about the book of Revelation? Do you know what it does to lost people? It helps them to repent. Oh man, did I ever repent! After reading Revelation I started doing some huge repenting! I started taking tools back to work that I had stolen! I had to sneak in what I had taken out! No one ever did that! I was trying so hard to say "ow" when I got hurt! I was an aviator in the Coast Guard, and aircraft mechanics rarely say "ow" when they get hurt! They are all kinds of words they have at their disposal when they get hurt, but never "ow"! It was so hard to say it! Through this period I had a girlfriend. Donna was the only girl that I ever dated that had been faithful to me. Every other girl I had before this had left me for someone else (which drove me to drink). This girl loved me and remained true to me! Near the end of Revelation I read a passage that mentioned "fornication" So I said to myself, "Fornicators!?! What's that?" So I went and looked it up in my Webster's dictionary and it said it was sexual intercourse involving an unmarried man or woman. When I found the definition I cried out, "Oh, no! No, no, no! God you can't mean it, you can't mean it!" I thought, "If I'm not dead for anything else, I'll be dead for this one!" So I called my girlfriend up, and told her we needed to talk. So I picked her up, took her to the beach and said, "We have to stop seeing each other." "Why," she asked? "Well, I read in Revelation that God punishes people for what we have been doing in bed." She said, She said, "Well, then we'll stop!" Then I said, "I don't think so! I mean, I don't think we will really stop. Donna, I think I'm going to be a Christian and you're just not interested in this." So I told her that we had to break up. She cried really hard all the way home.

She continued to drink, and drank even more after that day. She was miserable. She called me every day crying, and the more that I heard the drinking and crying the less I wanted to be

around her. I didn't want to be around sin at all. I didn't understand the symbolism of Revelation (and all that), but I understood what God wanted me to understand. When Jesus comes back one had better be holy! I was doing my best to get after that! I decided to start going to church.

Of all the friends that I had, I knew only one person that I considered to be a true to his Christian faith. His name was Dave. I went to his church, in Elizabeth City. I had only been to church once in my life and that was I was about eight-years-old. My sister was Catholic, and I went to church with her on Easter. When services were over she asked me how I liked it. I told her that it was the worst, longest, most tortuous thing in my whole life. She then slapped me on the head! How's that for Catholic evangelism?

Dave's church worshiped totally different than people in the Church of Christ. They don't worship like we do at all! Of course, since I knew nothing about churches I didn't know that there was a difference! So I just reasoned that if God wanted people to dance around, scream, babble and stuff, then that was His business. After awhile I got used to it, but personally did not participate in it. What I did participate in, though, is the idea of wanting to be a Christian. So one Sunday morning I went forward and told the preacher that I wanted to be a Christian, and so he said, "You need to pray Jesus into your heart." We prayed the sinner's prayer. I bawled like a baby, and when I was finished I got into my truck and drove home. After I got home I realized that nothing had changed. I still felt the same! I didn't feel forgiven, I didn't feel washed, and all that stuff they told me that I would feel. So I kept studying, kept praying for salvation, kept talking to my friend, and I went back to church with him the next Sunday.

That day the pastor was preaching, and then all of a sudden someone went nuts, and then everybody went crazy. The whole service "exploded" for about twenty minutes, then it all calmed down. The preacher offered the invitation, and when he did I got up and went forward again! I told the preacher, "I'm still not saved, and I want to go to heaven." He said okay, and then went into a room, and came out with this little vial of oil. He anointed my head with oil, spoke in tongues over me, and meanwhile I'm crying huge tears pleading with the Lord, "Don't send me to hell! I'm sorry!" When it was all done, I drove home and the same thing happened again. I didn't feel any different! I felt as if nothing had changed. I thought, "Something's not right!" During that next week I prayed every day, asking God to save me. I was repenting more and more, and I was reading the Bible every day.

I went back to church the next Sunday and for the third Sunday in a row I responded to the invitation! I'll never forget that guy's look! One can only imagine what he thought when he saw this guy (me) coming down the aisle for the third time! I said, "I'm still not a Christian, I've got demons in me, and I'm lost, and I don't want to go to hell!" The preacher said, "Church, this takes mucccccch prayer!" Suddenly every person in that entire church (85 people) got up out of the pews! They came up to the front, laid their hand, finger, whatever they could get on me, and they all began to pray over me, and here I am bawling to God to please, please save me! I had all these people praying over me, and this time, when it was all done and after everyone went home or everyone went out to eat, I sat in my truck in the parking lot and waited to see if it worked. I waited, and sure enough when I stopped crying, I didn't feel forgiven. So I walked back into the building and I knocked on the pastor's door. He opened the door up and I said, "I don't know what's

wrong, but I'm still not saved. If I died right now I wouldn't go to heaven." His answer was simple: "John, isn't it obvious? You don't have enough faith." I felt as if I had been punched in the face.

At this time in my life, everything seemed to be coming apart.

My former girlfriend is calling me everyday, begging me to take her back (and I won't); my friends are calling me a jerk because I broke her heart, and to make matters worse, I'm being called a weirdo at work because I'm now talking about Jesus as well as taking stolen tools back to work! I'm still trying to say "ow", and trying to remember all that I have learned. I'm doing all this, and THEN the preacher tells me, that God said, "Sorry John, it's not quite enough!" I have heard that all my whole life! "John, that's not enough," is what I heard from my mom while growing up. I heard it from other people. My coaches and my teachers would say, "John, you're not doing quite enough to make me happy. You're going to have to do more to please me!" I had heard that message my whole life! It screwed me up so bad that I let it make me an alcoholic! Now guess who's telling me that I haven't done enough?

It's Almighty God!

Did I ever get mad! I mean I got volcanic mad. When I got home I took that Bible and I threw it to the corner of my bedroom and I said, "Fine! If that's the way it's going to be, and if I'm going to hell anyway, then I'm going to go to have the best time I can before I get there!" I started planning to pull a good drunk, but one thing after another got in my way! I had to fly out of town, so I couldn't do it then! I had to stand duty as well, and so this interfered with my plans. Finally after several days of this I had money in my pocket, and the time was right! It was Thursday, and I was ready to tie on a Wild Turkey drunk!

I walked out of my apartment, and as I put my hand to the handle of my truck door a woman in my apartment complex said, "John," and I said, "Yeah, what is it?" She said, "I want you to come over my house in about 20 minutes for a Bible study. There's a preacher coming over and he's going to study with me." I said, "I want nothing to do with that!" She said, "What? But, you've been going to church! I thought for sure that..." I said, "No way, I think that's a big bunch of hooley; I don't want anything to do with it!" Then she started begging me and saying, "Oh please John, I need someone to come over, that preacher is going to preach all over me, you know that I don't have a husband and I've got a kid! I can't be there all by myself!"

She begged me and since I was a really bad "people pleaser" at the time I told her, "As soon as it's over, I'm gone." So I'm sitting in her house, and this man, Paul comes over, opens up his briefcase, and he sets this little tape recorder on the coffee table. He set up a screen at the end of the living room, plugged in a little projector, and said, "We're going to watch a film strip about the Old Testament, and afterwards I'll see if you have any questions!" He turned out the light, started the recorder and projector, and here it is... Jule Miller filmstrip number one! I'm sitting and watching, and thinking about how ridiculous it all seems. Good grief, I'm watching cartoons of the Bible! It seemed so Mickey Mouse! To make matters worse the tapes were almost worn out, as they played they made funny noises, and the singing was off key because the tapes were dragging. It was horrible! But despite this, I knew nothing about the Old Testament, and so by the time it was done, I was interested. Wow, Patriarchal age, Noah and the flood, Abraham, and a lot of other things. When he got done, Paul put everything away,

and shared that he was student at Roanoke Bible College, there in town. He wasn't even a real preacher!

Now he's just sitting there, and he asks, "Well, does anybody here have any questions?" Did I ever get his attention! I said, "Yeah! How come I'm going to hell?" He said, "Excuse me?" I told him, "I've been going to church, I'm trying to get saved but it's just not working!" I then proceeded to tell him all the other things that I had been going through. Then he said, "John do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" Do I believe? Of course I believe! Then he said, "Have you repented?" I told him about returning stolen tools, breaking up with my girl, trying to say "ow!" He said, "Well, it obvious you've repented." Then he said, "Are you willing to confess?" I replied, "People at work are telling me to stop talking about Jesus." Paul then asked, "John, have you been baptized? Have you ever heard of it?" "Well, not really, no. I mean, next month a bunch of people at that church are going to dress in white and do it. I was thinking about doing it then."

So then he started showing me all these verses about the baptism. When he finished he said, "Do you understand this John?" And I said, "YEAH! There it is!! Right there is the door!" He said, "Do you want to walk through that door?" by then I was having a nicotine fit so I told him I was going to walk around the block and make my decision. When I returned I told Paul, "I'm ready, let's go." I put on my shorts and we headed down to the river. It was ten o'clock in the evening on July 31, 1980. I walked into the river that night scared half to death, because I knew that the river had snapping turtles and water moccasins in it! I was peering real close looking at the water, and as I took a few steps in I hit a muddy slope. My feet were sliding, but I wasn't taking steps! As this happened I said,

"Whoa, Paul! God's pulling me down into the water!" I was getting goose bumps! Then he said, "John, I have heard your confession; I baptize you now in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit." Down I went, and when I came out of that water, I KNEW that I was saved! I knew it; I knew in the very depth, the core, the deepest essence of my being, that Jesus Christ had washed me!

When I came up out of that water, before I even got up to dry land, another thing hit me. As I realized what had happened I began to cry. You see, for the first time in my adult life, I did not want to get high! For the first time in my adult life, I didn't want to drink! They told me I was going to die a drunk, but Jesus healed me of that! When I finally got up to the grass, I began to bawl and weep! Paul must have thought I was nuts! He said to me, "Are you okay?" "Am I okay? Man, I am so okay! Not only am I going to heaven but, God has healed me; I don't even want to get high!" What moved me so powerfully was that I hadn't even asked God to heal me of my addictions. I had only asked Him to give me happiness in spite my problem.

That night, when I got home I called my mom and told her I was saved. She cried and I cried. When I went to bed I prayed, "Father, if you can do this in me, then I am your man. Do with me whatever you want!" This was how I met Jesus. This is the story of how the Savior healed me. I pray daily that I live up to the vow I made to God on that beautiful night.

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