

MY STORY

I was born in a small rural town in Florida. My life started out quite unremarkably but got more and more interesting as time progressed. Court records show that I was physically and emotionally abused and/or neglected until about the age of two, and then taken away from my (birth) family of origin, and adopted into a caring and loving family.

I grew up as a problem child, but both my adopted parents came from backgrounds where they too had been abused and orphaned out at an early age so they had great patience, grace and compassion with me. Most of my teens were good and happy years although worldly, in a life of sex, drugs and Rock & Roll until I was baptized at 18 years of age (Southern Baptist). I then later married my High school sweetheart and Prom queen. We started having children 5 years later, and ended up with three beautiful children over the years. I joined the Federal Government, and soon climbed the ladder of success. Basically, I was a pew sitter, and lived a double life. I knew about Jesus, but I didn't know Him. I went to the local community college and got active in my career during my late twenties. It consumed me, it was my identity.

I became a Union Business Advocate, specializing in Contract Law for the APWU, AFL-CIO. Over the years I held elected positions at the Local, Regional, State, and Federal levels, sometimes simultaneously. I was a workaholic, working and traveling approximately 70 or more hours per week, doing Arbitrations and Mediations for the government. It was normal for me to work until 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. every night, including weekends. I even took my work with me on vacations. I was tied to it. I usually only spent weekends at home, but rarely actually participated with my family.

My career was my identity and my life. I was repeatedly elected over and over again. I enjoyed positions of authority and power because I had never had any before. I reached a point where I was guaranteed my job for life (until retirement), with excellent benefits and all of the perks that came with it.

I was furnished everything and traveled constantly, all expenses paid. Somewhere along the way I had gotten tangled up in pornography and the night club scene. The more I indulged, the more I wanted . . . but the more unsatisfying it became. It was during this unprecedented time in my professional life that I had a near death experience and it was very frightening and horrifying because instead of going towards the light, I had found myself in Hell. All this time before I thought that I was saved and could live any kind of lifestyle I wanted . . . but this got my attention. Immediately afterwards God began noticeably intervening in my life and plans. He started breaking into my dreams at night, asking me if I was satisfied with the life I was living. I wasn't. I had reached what I always thought that I wanted, money, prestige, power, position, etc. I had arrived at my pinnacle of success! (or - so I thought).

But, I didn't really enjoy the destination. I didn't like who I had become or the people that I worked with and/or for. My wife had grown apart from me during this time and had begun seeing other men in secret because I had been away on the road so much, and not emotionally present even when I was home. I didn't really know my children;

they had grown up without me really being much involved. I was not a nice person, and very alone even when I was in the presence of others.

All the stuff that "the company" would give to me just didn't compensate anymore for the deep heartache that I felt inside, and the material things no longer covered that up. I had arrived at what I thought was the top, but had "slashed and dashed" to get there, and left many wounded lives behind me on the climb. It wasn't a pretty sight, and God started showing all of this to me night after night.

The entire experience had become so overwhelming that sometimes I was late to my scheduled appointments over it (definitely not my normal priori). I couldn't figure out what was happening to me. Then one day, God audibly called my name, as if He was directly behind me, I looked around and I was all alone. What was going on? I chalked it up as just my imagination. But, it happened again! And again, from the inside out, as best that I can describe it, God asked me if I wanted something better, If I wanted His best... if I wanted real life and love?

(I should say here that at this time I was a Southern Baptist, who had never been taught about the Holy Spirit - except that His working - His presence - and especially His gifts and glossolalia - had ended with the apostles - and on top of that I had never been discipled - nor can I actually say that I was consciously seeking Him - but I was starting to examine my life and ask some hard questions about identity, meaning, purpose, love, life and death, and eternity).

And without waiting for my answer, He asked me if I would be willing to step out of my plans and into His? I knew it meant giving up everything that I had worked for, (I had just been re-elected again). He told me that I had two ways that I could go . . . my way, or His Way, there was no compromise, middle ground, or negotiations. I told God that I wanted Him. I saw a face all around me all at the same time (360 degrees) without me even turning my head. The face said "agreed."

I rushed back home to share all of this with my family only to find that my wife wanted a divorce, she had found someone else. We tried counseling, but she had her mind set and already made up on a new life with someone else, and she was sure that I would never change. And I probably wouldn't have if the following had never happened. At this point God decided to turn my life inside out and upside down.

"WRESTLING WITH GOD"

(My Defining Moment)

Has your heart and spirit ever ached so bad that the only thing that you had to compare it with was the memory of the throbbing pain in your thumb from having hit it with a hammer?

That is the way that I felt, when I was at the zenith of my career success wise, living the American dream . . . but my life and family was falling apart around me. I had achieved worldly success, but was totally miserable. I finally had to admit to myself and to God that the problem was mine. I had to quit hiding in my job.

All that I had ever wanted from the earliest that I can remember was to be loved, accepted and wanted, and to “live happily ever after.” It was my passion, because before the age of two I had been abused and abandoned by my birth parent(s). The Courts took custody over me while I was a small child, and then adopted me into a good family. However, the damage had already been done. Even at that early age I had already created so many coping and defense mechanisms to substitute for the rejection, loss of acceptance and love in my life, that I became trapped behind the very walls that I had created to protect and comfort myself.

Through the years, that numb, loveless, and emotionally detached lifestyle began to feel normal to me, after awhile, I forgot that it wasn't. I soon settled into a safe and comfortable, but dull and lifeless routine of sameness. I convinced myself that nothing better existed, and that love wasn't real, it was only something that existed in fairy tales and fantasy. I had reached what I believed to be the very pinnacle of my success, and this was it? There had to be more! This couldn't be all that life was; “Pain and suffering and then you die?” What about meaning and purpose, real joy, the abundant life . . . What about making a difference in this world? Why was I even born? I had questions but no answers.

Somewhere during those years of disappointments and rejection I had become alienated from myself, and had tried to compensate for the absence of affection in my life by burying myself in my career. I had thought that everyone felt as I did. But unconsciously, no matter how hard I had tried to convince myself otherwise, somewhere deep inside me, in the most secret part of my being, I knew somehow, that true love was real . . . and I ached for it.

But, all of that pain and disappointment didn't surface until my self constructed world crumbled down around me, as “I” came to the end of myself. It was at this point in my life, and only after several personal crises, that I quit playing Christian. “I” laid down my victim mentality and got real with God. “I” finally realized that “I” was the only common thread throughout every problem that “I” had. “I” quit blaming others and my past for what was going on in my present-day life. “I” accepted responsibility and admitted to God that the problem was with me, but that “I” didn't know exactly what it was, or how to fix it. So, “I” asked God to change me. “I” gave Him full permission to do whatever He wanted to do in and with my life. All I knew was that I had always felt different than others, and that I hurt. I fell down to my knees and sobbed. Then and there I prayed the most honest, earnest, and fervent heart-felt prayer to the lord that I have ever prayed.

I begged God, that if He truly cared for me personally, for Him to please allow me before I died, to know love as he had intended and meant it to be. At that very moment . . . liquid electricity saturated every part of my being. I felt intensely warm all over, and knew that God had really heard me and was going to answer my prayer.

I knew that He would send someone to love me, maybe a “hot” babe (yes, that is where I was) I wanted to be loved even at my very worst, even when I wasn't lovable, even when I had already messed everything up. He did! The God of the universe came Himself personally.

Everything else seemed to disappear from around me, and only He and I remained. I don't really know whether He was before me, or if I was before Him. What I did realize was that I was in the presence of something or someone so far beyond my expectations and comprehension that it shook my very being to its core. I had an awareness that nothing was hidden from Him. I was totally exposed inside and out. Everything that I had believed in, my very foundations, my entire world was totally and irrevocably shattered (remember I was Southern Baptist during this time). I couldn't stop shaking. I tried to hide my face because I knew that I was in the presence of something or someone supernatural, and exceedingly far greater than my human understanding. I wrestled with what seemed like an eternity to stay focused and poised . . . I wasn't sure whether what or who was with me was good or evil . . . part of me wanted to scream . . . “Run for your life!” While another part of me wanted to surrender and embrace the moment, and yield to Him, bask in His light and just take it all in.

Finally, I reconciled it in my spirit, and peace flooded my soul. As I did . . . somewhere beyond my mind I had a revelation that I was in the presence of . . . Jesus! And at that very moment, fully captured by His presence . . . I audibly heard Him say, “Now you love me.”

He told me of His love for me . . . and that He wanted to take me to a higher plane, but added that it would cost me everything. He asked me . . . “Am I enough?” (God asks some very tough questions) He told me that I had been living a defended life, full of competition and conflict, and at war with everything and everybody. He said that if I wanted more I had to surrender all of that and walk in agreement with Him, and no longer "conflict/over-reactive" and defensively oriented.

“The choice is yours?” “It is all or nothing.” I answered . . . Yes! Instantly, I was forever changed (but not flawless). I knew what He was asking was going to radically change and transform my life, but to deny who I knew Him to be ~ Jesus ~ made everything else seem meaningless. His presence disappeared from before my eyes, but a knowing that He still was with me remained. I had encountered God Face to face.

Suddenly, a brilliant flash of light exploded all around me, and then passed right through me. I could see, feel, taste, touch, smell, and even hear it . . . It was beyond tangible . . . and the scripture verse John 14:21(b) was revealed to me. I had to look it up because I hadn't been a Bible reader. It read, “. . . I manifest Myself to those who love Me . . .” (Sorry, I cannot remember which Bible version that this originally came from, it

may very well be paraphrased - but in reviewing it for this article in no less than seven various Bibles - they all remain true to the intent and spirit - and very close in actual wording. The full verse reads . . . "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and manifest myself to him.") NIV

I fell down on my face and cried Jesus tears non-stop for four solid hours. The tears constantly flowed down my cheeks in gratitude and thankfulness, in the realization that I had finally been loved for who I was, right where I was, at my very worst and darkest hour. My life has never been the same since, and I have never been alone from that time forward. It has been a process . . . of letting go of my past to receive God's present.