

Brandon Gwinn's Testimony

I was raised in a Christian home and had a very loving and supportive family but I lived a sort of sheltered life. When I was 7 years old, a chain of events started happening that would shape the downfall that led to my rock bottom experience and ultimately my transformation.

My half-brother lived with me and my parents until I was about 5 years old. During this time we got along just as well as any two brothers growing up would. We had our disagreements but we would always get over it and go back to wrestling, digging holes in the basement and playing with GI Joe's. He left over the summer to live with his Dad and Step-Mom for a year or two and came back a completely different person. He began to be more physical, pushing me around and trying to control me. He began to constantly belittle me, taunt and put me down. We go into heated arguments. I smashed a couple of my prized toys out of so much pinned up hatred and anger. He's slammed me against the wall; choked me, threatened to kill me, broke down my door, and chased me with a weed-eater, acting like he was going to take my life. I was traumatized and I was no longer that free hearted innocent child I use to be. I built up heavy walls around myself and had a new deep-seated, explosive rage.

At the same time, I was starting to get out of the house and hang out in the neighborhood but where I lived a sheltered life and have a mild form of Tourette's syndrome, I started getting some ridicule from the other kids, so I changed. I began to adopt some of the ways of a delinquent child in the making. I started getting into fights, chasing after girls and dabbling here and there in neighborhood mischief. As time went on, I noticed a tension within myself. I was torn between my good, Christian upbringing and who I was letting the world pressure me to be.

When I was 13, my family and I moved from WV to KY. I was completely new and I didn't know anybody. I didn't take the move very well and people didn't know how to take me. I was just trying to find my place. I found myself living for other people with no real identity and I didn't know who I

was. I went from a nobody, to a prep, to a country boy in a matter of 3 years and I started to smoke and drink. The only thing I did that was true to myself was joining the Boy Scouts, riding dirt bikes on the pipeline trails and messing around the woods. I've always loved the woods.

When I got my license, I started running around and smoking pot. My grades started plummeting and it got to where all I did was run around, smoke pot and get drunk. I fell into a state of depression. I became withdrawn and empty. I lost my license and all my "friends" disappeared and acted like they didn't know me. I started to realize how empty I was and how I didn't even know who I was or what I stood for. I began to ask those big questions like, "Who am I, What am I here for, what do I stand for and what's the point to all this"? Everything just seemed so meaningless to me. I knew deep down inside that the answers lied within the Christian faith of my upbringing, but I was tired of letting down myself, my family, my church and God time and time again. I knew I couldn't do it. So, I told God if He wanted me, He' have to get me.

After transferring out of the main High School into the alternative school I graduated by the skin of my teeth. I just wanted to get my diploma and get out. After graduation I had no structure. Life was starting me in the face and I had no clue what to do. I wanted to join the military ever since I was young but you can't enlist if you have Tourette's syndrome. So, I was lost in every sense of the word. I had a full time job, a new truck and was making good money but I was still lost. I still had no purpose and I couldn't see any order or future for my life.

Everything seemed so meaningless, like chasing after the wind. Everyday people would wake up and scramble back and forth, working to exhaustion and for what? To get things that spoil, fade away and things that bring no lasting joy and satisfaction, only for a fleeting sense of temporary pleasure and fulfillment. Life just seemed to be filled with so much vanity and every vain pursuit only ended in death.

So, what was the point? Yeah, life has its moments, but it's filled with so much pain, so much death, and so much sorrow. All I could see was the

evil in the world; families shattered by divorce, children growing up in broken homes, friends stabbing each other in the back, countries torn by war, lands stricken by famine and a world consumed with selfishness and greed. I felt like I had a gaping void within me that was crying out for something more.

The deep anger and bitterness from the scars of my past, the social anxieties from a desperate search of identity and purpose and the despair of my very existence converged to create one explosive cocktail. I became apathetic, emotionally numb, and mentally unstable and I began to shut down.

Over the previous year or so, I had been getting interested in apocalyptic type scenarios, but now I was really getting into it. It was the only thing that gave me any hope or sense of purpose to belong to. I was on the internet all the time and was convinced that the economy was about to collapse, carrying social order along with it. I began to buy first aid, food, survival supplies, and guns. I became completely careless and reckless and had no regard for humanity. I just wanted the world to end.

As I was stockpiling guns, ammo and other stuff, I thought I was running out of time. So, even though I had a full time job, I decided I needed more money. Careless and reckless as I was, I got the bright idea to rob this gas station. I went in there, fired the gun, and got the money. I got caught up in some back roads and after about 10 cops and a high speed chase into WV. I pulled over and gave up. They cuffed me, threw me in the back of the cruiser, and sent me to jail.

The first two nights in jail, I was in a holding cell and I just tried to get some sleep. I was mentally and emotionally exhausted and I just wanted it all to go away. They put me in general population the third day, and that night my cellie offered me some books to read. I noticed a Bible, so I grabbed it out of the window and began to flip through it. I continued to flip through it the next day and I could tell that God was calling me back to Him. That night as I lay on my mat, I would have one of the most profound experiences of my life.

As I began to lie there, thinking about my whole ordeal, it all started to hit me, I completely broke down. Trying to be quiet and hold back the

tears, I became completely overwhelmed by such a deep sense of guilt, dirtiness, and disgrace; I had ruined my life. I had dug a pit that I saw no way out of, the word kept coming back to was disgrace. I had become a disgrace to myself, my family, my church, my community and to God. I began to pour out my heart to God in misery and despair. I felt so unworthy and so small. I begged God for just a sliver of mercy, for help, for something.

Then in the middle of my cry for help, I heard 3 quiet but powerful words come into my thoughts that would change my life forever; "It'll be alright". As soon as I heard those words, it felt like warm, tingling oil poured over my entire body from head to toe and I felt such a peace as I had never felt before in my life. I could feel the presence of God surround me and I knew He was telling me not to worry. I was in His hands now, and everything was going to be alright. That night, I went to bed knowing that my God had saved me.

In the following weeks, I began to dive into God's word with passion and I found it to be a treasure waiting to be discovered. I was so hungry for God. Why I had not read it before I do not know. But God began to reveal Himself to me in ways He never had before and it was so beautiful. I learned more about God and scripture over the next year than I had in my entire life and He still reveals more of Himself to me each day.

I'm not going to lie and say it's been easy; it's been more like a rollercoaster ride than a bed of roses. I've had my mountain tops and my valleys but through it all Christ is with me. What makes the difference is that instead of trying to live up to God's standards, I finally just let go and accepted Christ's grace, forgiveness and love; allowing His life and power to flow through me and transform my life. When we get our eyes off ourselves and our own efforts and begin to focus on just letting go, abiding in Christ and knowing who God is in a personal way, our lives begin to truly change.

It continues to be a daily journey and daily walk with God. Seeking God doesn't stop when you get saved. It's just beginning. Every day I need to renew my mind with His Word and spend time with Him alone in prayer and spirit; nurturing and building upon that relationship. He is the center of

my joy and the provision for my every need and as long as we abide in Him, He'll take care of the rest.

I can finally say I now know who I am; more importantly, whose I am. God has made me a new person. I have a renewed purpose, a new identity, new hope and a new life. I have something to live for now; something to stand for, something meaningful. I now know that when this life is over, I'll cross that gap and step into eternity to be with my Lord forever. The joy which that brings me, no man could ever take away.

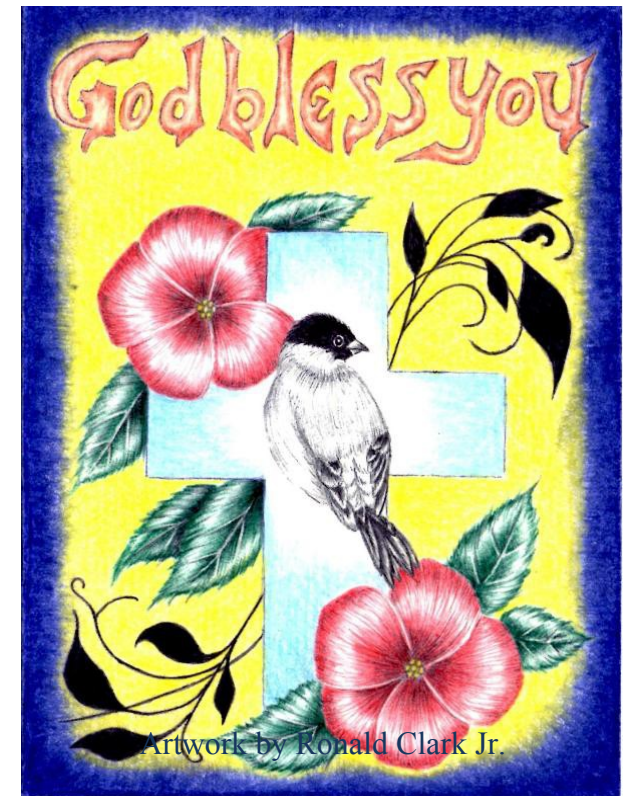
I can now say with the Apostle Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me". **Galatians 2:20.**

This life is only to prepare us for the next. It is only a vapor, carried along by the winds and then it's gone. At the end of this life, the only thing that will matter is if you've found life in Christ. My prayer is that you would seek God and find true satisfaction and fulfillment in Him, because only in Him is it found. Every person is created with a God shaped void that only God Himself can fill. Our hearts are restless until we find rest in Him, and when we have nothing left but God, we discover that God is enough. God bless you.

I hope this testimony has been a blessing to you. If you would like to read how others in similar situations have experienced the life transforming power of God please write to me at the address below. We now have over 100 testimonies of those whose lives have been transformed by God's amazing Grace. We also have over 100 Con-tracts. Please send us your testimony as well. We also appreciate artwork and poetry to use in this ministry.



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