

## ONE MAN'S TESTIMONY (Part One)

A pastor friend of mine made the statement to me several years ago that he did not think much of personal testimonies given publicly. I disagreed with him then, but I now realize that his dislike of personal testimonies had some merit. I can now see that far too often when a person gives their personal testimony in a public forum there is a great tendency to draw attention to themselves. The more dramatic the testimony, the more those of us listening are inclined to look up to the person as being special, being spiritually mature and walking in the favor of GOD. If we are not careful this can lead us to a form of spiritual idolatry which GOD hates.

In years past this writer has shared his personal testimony in a public forum on many occasions. However, in recent years I have felt less and less inclined to talk about my personal encounter with our GOD for the very reason that I do not want to draw attention to myself but rather to my Master who has been robbed of so much honor and glory that only He is due. Not only that, but I fully realize that I am a long, long way from being the son that He has called me to be. One of the last persons that anyone should look up to spiritually is this writer. My robe still contains a lot of spots and wrinkles. However, as my friend Les would say – "Today I got a bump in my spirit" to share my testimony one more time and I am learning to follow Him and trust that there must be a reason for this writer's testimony at this time.

I pray that what follows here will speak to my three children and their spouses. But also to my many friends in the business and professional world who are daily having to deal with the Babylonian system that is directly opposed to the Kingdom of GOD. This writer's entire adult life has been spent in the world system and I now have a burden for those who are attempting to serve both GOD and the system just as I did for so many years before FATHER set me free. Finally, I pray that what each of you reads here will be used by the Holy Spirit to give you a clearer revelation of the One we are called to follow and serve – JESUS CHRIST of Nazareth.

As I begin this message I am overwhelmed by the awareness of how blessed I have been and how absolutely unworthy of His blessing I am. This writer was born into a middle class American family and given a mother and father who were committed Christians. Not only that, but I was also given grandparents on both sides of the family who were Christians. Faith in GOD and prayer were a part of my inheritance as I began life, as we know it. Church and Sunday school attendance were not an option in my family. My brother Drake and I were required to be in church whenever the doors were cracked open. At eleven years of age, I made a profession of faith and was baptized at Lexington Avenue Baptist Church in Danville, Kentucky. As far as the church, my family and those around me were concerned, I was now saved and whenever my time came to die I was assured of going to heaven where I would join all my loved ones and live happily forever and forever. There was only one problem – I was not spiritually reborn!

*"Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, He cannot see the Kingdom of God." (John 3:3)*

For the next thirty-two or thirty-three years this writer lived for only one person - "myself". I was consumed with covetness, a lust of the flesh, a craving for wealth, and the power that goes with it. I was a manipulator, a controller, a liar, a thief and a man of unclean lips. I had a "self confidence" that was scary. I truly

believed that I could do or have anything that I wanted. "I" was in control and enjoying every minute of it. Thank GOD for His mercy.

By the time I was in my early twenties I had survived two car wrecks that easily could have taken my life, as well as a cancer scare. I had learned how to manipulate my way through college by getting close to the President of the college and those around him. I understood the power structure and how it worked. I would even go so far as to date one of my professors if that was what it took to get what I wanted.

By the time I was a junior in college, I had become interested in politics and the power that it offered. Within less than two years I found myself serving as a State Youth Chairman for a U. S. Senatorial candidate, followed by the same position for a gubernatorial candidate. Now in my early twenties I found myself serving as an aide and travel companion to the Governor of Kentucky. Once again, I was very close to the seat of power and learned quickly how to adapt myself so that I could continue on with my lust to satisfy "self". Thank GOD for His mercy.

After briefly entertaining thoughts of pursuing a life of politics, I came to the conclusion that wealth was what I now needed. I had learned by this time that with wealth came power and influence. I felt that I had everything else I needed, but the one thing that I lacked was wealth. I had self-confidence, was a trained public speaker and debater, and I now understood the power structure. Not only that, but I had friends in high places and I knew they would help me. I still remember visiting my Mother in the hospital and sharing my next goal in life with her. My goal was to become a millionaire by the time I was thirty years of age. Thank GOD for His mercy.

In 1965 I came to the conclusion that I needed to settle down and get married. I now know that FATHER once again blessed me as He sent me a wife, one who would be faithful to me and stay with me in spite of "me". Judy and I were then given three healthy children that have never been anything but a blessing to us. To this day, Will, Elizabeth and Ben have always been a pleasure to us. And now they have taken wives and a husband and given us four grandchildren. What a blessing we find in Alex, Katie, Madison and Tommy. Our daughter-in-laws – Leigh Ann and Becky and our son-in-law Tim are added blessings to our family – truly we have been blessed. Oh yes, we have had a few rough spots along the way, but the blessing of family has never faded.

After settling down with Judy and starting our family I now turned back to the pursuit of worldly success. In addition to my business pursuits, I also realized that I needed to get established in civic affairs. In fairly short order I was serving on the Mayor's advisory council followed by serving as Chairman of the local Red Cross Board. In addition to this civic service, I also was active in the Rotary Club where I served as President and then as one of two District Governors in Kentucky. I was now well established in the area of civic service.

During these years my family and I were reasonably faithful to our Church. We attended Sunday services regularly. Our children were in Sunday school, we gave our tithe and were charitable in other giving. And, oh yes, I made it a point to develop a close personal relationship with several pastors in our area. One or two of these pastors became close personal friends and remain so today. However, even while active in the Church and civic affairs, my primary focus was on being successful in the business world and continue to build my fortune. Little did I know that all during this time, out of my sight, there was a Mother, a Father, and Grandparents praying for me. Thank GOD for His mercy.

On or about the time that I turned 30 years of age I reached my goal of becoming a millionaire, at least on paper. I was now living the American dream and had become a part of the local power structure. Life was good - my family and I were healthy and whole. We were accepted in all the right social circles, invited to the right parties, lived in a fine new home in one of the best neighborhoods in town and we vacationed in

Naples, Florida, where we now owned a new condo. We were members of the local country club where we entertained many of our friends. The only problem was, what I had was not enough and so I had set a new goal of attaining a second million dollars. Thank GOD for His mercy.

Reaching the goal of attaining a net worth of two million dollars came quickly. Then it was three million and after reaching three million, my goal was four. However, I had begun to set my sights on ten million. During the decade of the 70's and early 80's this writer experienced a level of business and financial success that overwhelmed me. I was buying, selling and developing real estate as fast as I could close a loan at the bank. While my major projects were all in Kentucky, I had begun to set my sights on deals in Tennessee, Florida, Colorado and Ohio. My confidence was growing daily, and I found that making money was easier than anything that I had ever done. Not only that, but I became an expert on legally sheltering my income from taxes. During those years I acquired seven vacation homes - four at one time. This writer owned airplanes, houseboats, motor homes and all the latest electronic gadgets on the market. There were five motor vehicles in the driveway and only two licensed drivers. At one time my greatest problem was keeping up with where I had placed my money. There were stocks, money market funds, savings accounts, certificates of deposit, etc., etc. I probably had at least a dozen or more bank accounts in numerous banks in several states. I spent money like there was no end to its availability. If my heart desired it - I simply bought it. Fine art and collectibles, Rolex watches and full-length mink coats were soon added to our storehouse of wealth.

During this period of my life, I found that I had friends in all the right places. I could get things done and now others sought me out to get advice, and counsel. On the civic front, I was leading the effort to establish scholarship funds, and raising money for all sorts of charitable causes. On the church front I was meeting with church boards and giving advice of how to expand and grow their individual church. On the political front, my support for candidates seeking public office was sought and in 1979 I even agreed to manage a friend's campaign for Governor of Kentucky. On the business front, I continued to expand my interests. From real estate I now moved into hotels, motels, thoroughbred horse racing and set my sights on buying a bank. These were heady days indeed. Little did I know that now in addition to a Mother, Father, Brother and Grandparents praying for me, others had been moved by GOD to also pray for me. I was on my way to hell from the front pew of the church. Thank GOD for His mercy!

JESUS Himself said, "No one can come to Me unless the FATHER who sent Me draws him." (See John 6:44) It was going to take GOD Himself to draw me to JESUS. As the saints of GOD appealed to Him on my behalf, He answered their prayers. All through the years that I have described here, there were many times when FATHER drew me toward JESUS. Let me share just one of those times.

I was 33 years old and right in the middle of living a Baboloyian life style. It was a Friday - Good Friday, preceding Easter Sunday. I was at my desk working on a deal when all of a sudden I had a strong desire to take a ride through the countryside. I told my secretary that I was going out for a while and would return. I got in my car and drove with no set destination. As I drove out of town, I felt led to drive out to a farm that I had sold a few years earlier. I drove to the farm, entered the drive and drove the half mile back to our former home where I turned around and began to drive back to the main highway. As I drove through one of the fields that was surrounded by forest, I was led to pull off the drive, park and get out of the car. I walked out into the middle of the field where I stood admiring its beauty. All of a sudden, I was overwhelmed with the revelation of the fact that JESUS, at exactly my age, died for me. I dropped to my knees and wept like a baby. Thank GOD for His mercy.

As soon as I returned to the cares and worries of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things (see Mark 4:19), I soon forgot what had happend in the middle of a cow pasture on one sunny Good Friday afternoon. It would be at least 12 more years before GOD woke me up. And the saints of GOD kept on praying. There would be more supernatural encounters with GOD along the way, because GOD is faithful, even when we are not. Oh, I thank GOD for His mercy.

Finally, in the fullness of GOD'S time for me, He woke me up. It was now the mid eighties and I was approaching my mid forties. Life was good. I had no major, earth shaking problems, Judy had not left me, my children were healthy and a blessing, and my business was getting bigger and better all the time. I had powerful business partners, was traveling on corporate jets and living the good life. Of course, I was still in church, giving my tithe and living as I thought a good Christian should. I was minding my own business and doing my own thing. I certainly was not looking for, nor was I expecting, what was about to happen. Thank GOD for His mercy.

At this point in my life, FATHER directed me back to an old friend and former business associate, Dave Clark. Dave was a very successful engineer and businessman who had met JESUS and as a result of that encounter had turned and was following Him. I do not have the space here to tell of how GOD moved in restoring our friendship. It was totally supernatural, and maybe I will write about it later. But now Dave and his wife Gingie joined with my family in lifting Judy and I into the heavens, before the GOD of all time and eternity. Not only that, but Dave and Gingie began to gently shepherd Judy and I into the reality of knowing and experiencing JESUS CHRIST. FATHER was now moving "openly" on my behalf, and things were happening rapidly, very rapidly. I am fully persuaded that GOD called out my name audibly and instructed His angels to go after me. In Psalm 147:4 we are told that GOD calls us by name, and in verse 15, GOD declares: "He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly."

The command of GOD had now been heard on the earth, and His word was overtaking me very swiftly, even though I did not have a clue as to what was happening. Thank GOD for His mercy. As I think back on those days I can now see that I was being drawn daily into the realm of the Holy Spirit. My mind was continually turning from the world to the heavens and though I did not understand it, I knew that "truth" and the reality of life was not in the world, but rather it was to be found in the spirit realm. I began to crave "truth" and I set my sights on finding that "Truth". Please remember that I was not motivated to pursue JESUS because of some tragedy or major problem in my life. I was living the American dream. I was not pursuing GOD. GOD was pursuing me. Oh I thank GOD for His mercy.

During this time, I found myself in Gatlinburg, Tennessee where I had become involved in a major condo project. Early one morning as I sat alone in one of our large town houses overlooking the grandeur of the Smoky Mountains, I entered into a covenant with the GOD of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There was no emotion, no lightning, no thunder and no pressure on me. I simply told FATHER that for the balance of my days, if I ever read His word again, that I would accept it as absolute truth. Whether I understood it or not would make no difference. Whether others, including all preachers believed it or not would make no difference. I told FATHER, that as an act of my own free will, I would stand on Genesis 1:1 and on Revelation 22:21, the beginning and the end of His word. I told Him that I would embrace, as absolute truth, every jot and every tittle of His word, and that I would accept His word for what It says of Itself. My covenant with GOD was now sealed in His word. I had entered into fellowship with GOD through The Word.

While I am not clear on the exact time frame, it was very soon after returning to Kentucky from the Tennessee project that I called on two Christian businessmen and friends, that I held in high regard, to come to my office for a visit. In that meeting, I asked my friends about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. After a lengthy discussion, I asked Chuck and Jim to pray for me to receive this baptism. (See Acts 19:1-7) After praying and laying hands on me, I did not experience any supernatural manifestations whatsoever. So I asked them to pray for me again and they did. Again, nothing happened, at least not in the natural. No shaking, no tongue speaking, no falling down – nothing! Now I believe any of these things can and do happen from time to time when we have an encounter with the Spirit of GOD but do not let anyone tell you that these signs always follow, because they do not! Our GOD moves in strange and mysterious ways and He is not going to perform for us on command. I left that meeting that night, not quite sure of what to expect

and I must confess that I wasn't even sure that Chuck's and Jim's prayers had taken. But they had, and the signs were to follow. Thank GOD for His mercy!

Two very dramatic signs soon followed. First, I went to bed with a foul mouth and woke up with a clean mouth. Let me explain. While you would not have heard my foul language as I played the role of business, civic or church leader, nevertheless I could curse with the best of cursing sailors. From my earliest high school days I developed a foul mouth and I would unleash it from time to time. I knew and repeated the foulest of jokes. I do now thank GOD that I never made a habit of using His name in vain. In fact, I can still remember how hearing His name in vain grieved me.

Now all of a sudden, overnight, all, and I do mean "all" foul language left me. I was not even aware of it. I did not have to think, "I cannot use that word anymore", there was not even a trace of that foul language in my mind or heart. I had been delivered from a demonic cursing spirit. You see, when the Holy Spirit literally manifests Himself in us the demons of hell must leave. **They must!**

The second sign that followed and by far the most dramatic, was the supernatural gift of "Word hunger". Up until that time, I had never seriously read, much less studied the word of GOD. I found it dull, boring and difficult to understand. Now all of a sudden, I had a deep desire to read the Bible. In fact, it was a craving that I could not resist. Not only that, but I received much revelation of the word as I read and studied it. It was exciting and I could not wait to get into the Book of Life as each day went by. I carried a Bible to the office and kept another in the car. My zeal for GOD the FATHER and my passion for His Son JESUS was growing daily. I was literally on fire spiritually.

It has now been at least 18 years since FATHER opened His word to me and I can report that my hunger for His word is as strong today as it has ever been. And I can also report that whatever knowledge and understanding of His word that I may have, I have received by revelation as a gift from His Holy Spirit. No man, or institution of man has given me any revelation whatsoever. I must also tell you that in relation to the wholeness of GOD and the fullness of His word, I know virtually nothing. I must also tell you that all that has happened to me, that is good, is the result of nothing that "I" have done. Nothing whatsoever! I have only received the free gift of GOD. Our GOD is full of grace and mercy. I do not understand it, but He is, and what He does for one son or daughter, He desires to do for all. That includes you!

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." (James 1:17)

As the days turned into weeks, the weeks turned into months and the months into years, I saw clearly that the old things of life were passing away and all things were new. (See 2 Corinthians 5:17) Those of us who are truly following JESUS are in transition. We are in the process of being transformed into His image. As we draw closer and closer to the Lord, the way becomes narrower and narrower. Not only that, but it becomes extremely difficult. In the end, very few actually find their way.

"Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Matthew 7:14)

Most of us who call ourselves Christians never get very far in the maturing process, because while we want salvation and heaven, we do not want to give up the world and its pleasures. We think to do so would lead to a dull, boring life that was void of pleasure. But I can tell you that that is a lie from hell. Few have sampled the pleasures of the world more than I, and I can guarantee you that there is no high like a high on JESUS. There is no peace like the peace of abiding in JESUS, and there is no joy in life worth having, except the joy of JESUS. (See John 15:11 and John 16:24) But I must tell you that you cannot have it both ways – the world and its pleasures and JESUS at the same time. You cannot!

"No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

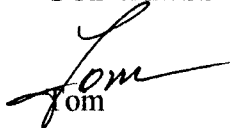
(Matthew 6:24)

At some point, we must all decide who we will serve. We must decide to whom will we give our loyalty. Always remember that the only thing that FATHER requires, in the beginning, is a "willing" heart. That's all! If you are not quite ready to "sell out" to JESUS, begin to ask FATHER to change your heart. Be honest with Him. He loves honesty, and will always respond to you as a loving FATHER. Never give up – never until He reveals Himself to you. Once our FATHER reveals JESUS to us, we quickly find that He is sufficient. Drop the pursuit of religion and begin to focus only on JESUS. Soak in His word. Find out what He has to say. Listen to Him and Him alone.

There is so much more that I would like to share here, but time and space will not allow me to do so. However, I must tell you that following my spiritual awakening, I continued pursuing my new spiritual interest as I had my business interests. I quickly found men who were leaders in the Church and I got to know them. I ran all over the country chasing my spiritual heroes and began to entertain visions of spiritual grandeur. I ran first to one meeting or conference and then to another – over and over, I ran to and fro. I became consumed by the Charismatic movement and fascinated by signs and wonders. I began to organize Bible study groups, prayer meetings and couples retreats. Not only that, but now I was going to make more money to fund the work of ministry. We placed Christian bookracks in the hotel lobbies and refused to sell alcohol in the restaurants. In one motel, we started a Sunday worship service for the travelers and we entertained the local ministerial association. Several local newspapers did feature stories about this Christian businessman who was boldly speaking out for JESUS. I was now moving into a leadership role and of course, I was once again in control, or so I thought. Oh I thank GOD for His mercy.

FATHER was now about to teach me some spiritual truths that would forever change my way of thinking. Not only that, but He was about to deal with some of the old Tom that was still hanging around. Trials and tribulations were about to bring me into a place where I had never been before and where I did not want to go. But the choice was not mine for FATHER had "said", and it was about to be so. I will conclude this testimony in Part Two.

GOD BLESS

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tom". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "GOD BLESS".