

The Testimony of Devon Shaffer  
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I get anxiety really easily. Jack knows that. It gets physical. Right now I feel nauseous so I'd just like to take a moment to pray.

*Father God, I just come before you now and just give you praise. Lord God, I just thank you. Thank you so much, just thank you for who you are and what you have done in my life, Lord. Thank you for this opportunity that you've given me to honor you, Lord. You know my heart and you know that is my desire. Also you know me better than I know myself and you know what I am feeling right now and you know the fear. We know, Lord, that nothing in you is of fear so I ask you, Lord, that you just give me the peace, your peace, Lord. Just fill me with it so that I can give you all praise and glory properly as you would see fit. And I asked this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

I will just give you a short little background into who I was before I came to know Christ. I didn't know anything about the Bible or anything that it said or Jesus. I had never been to church growing up. I don't think I ever remember a family that ever did go to church growing up. I grew up in West Palm Beach, Florida and we kind of just did what we wanted to. My mother died, passed away when I was 13 years old and by the time I was about 14 ½, I had gone and moved with my father and we had come to Kentucky. By the time I was 14 ½ years old, I was so out of control that my dad just said, "Look, I don't know what to do with you. You've got a Social Security check coming in every month from your mother's death. I'm going to buy you this mobile home and you're on your own. You pay the bills, you're responsible for yourself but I can't do this." So that's what I did. At 14 ½ years old, I was on my own and have been ever since.

I didn't know anything about Christ or what it was to live a godly life so I had nothing really to compare it to so everything I had done or knew was normal to me so I was completely dysfunctional. I have four children, started up pretty early. Got pregnant for the first time at 15 and had my first son at 16. The second one at 17. Had a daughter at 22 and my last one at 23. Two boys and two girls. They are now 18, 17, 11 and 10. About ten years ago, during the pregnancy of my last daughter, it was a very, very, very dark time for me. Very, very, depressed and suicidal. Anything that you can probably imagine being in bondage to, I was in bondage to but it was a way of life to me, I didn't know anything different. Nobody had ever told me anything different so I didn't know. Really, essentially, I had no hope.

About this time, my children's paternal grandmother, her husband committed suicide and her mother had died who she had been the sole caretaker for so she was very distraught. She decided to go to church. She got saved and when she got saved, she got saved. And so my view of Christians was from her. She was a bit fanatical for me and actually I thought she had lost her mind because of everything that had happened and just so how on-fire she was and so really didn't want any part of it. It was a bit too much for me. Then I met some Baptist people and kind of thought they were sticks-in-the-mud. So I couldn't find a balance but I believed with my mind that this was the way, the route to go, because I'd heard testimonies of people who had lived a life contrary, that was the way of mine but contrary to the way of God and then them being delivered from it and then living a whole new life and being brand-new and I wanted that. But I didn't know how to go about it.

So my first kind of encounter with a church was at a Baptist church and it was a revival and some people had invited me there and I went there and I was convicted in my mind more so than my heart. I believed because they were preaching hell fire and brimstone. You know, it was a typical revival, traditional revival. I was scared. I knew that everything they were preaching was me and I knew that if I died that night, that I would go to hell and I didn't want to go to hell but I didn't know I was a sinner. I just knew that if I died, I would go to hell but I didn't know anything about being a sinner. So I was physically affected by this and was crying and stuff and the preacher said, "You, come here right now." So he called me up into the middle of this revival and so I didn't want to offend them and I was embarrassed and I was put on the spot and I wanted to be respectful so I went to the front and he said, "Are you saved?" I said, "No sir, I'm not." He said, "Would you like to be?" I said, "Well, I think so. You know, I don't want to go to hell." All that I knew was that I didn't want to go to hell. He said, "Well, we need to pray right now and all you ladies come up here and pray with her." So we were literally down there for over an hour praying and I stood up and I said, "I'm wasting all y'all's time." I think I was waiting on a feeling at that time but more so I didn't know if my heart, what my standing was and that I was a sinner.

So that was my first experience with church. After that, I was really just even more so depressed and felt kind of like a lost cause. I had my daughter in October, Grace, ironically. I had her in October 2002 and November 2002 I was arrested because of my lifestyle. I was with four buddies and we were at a home and a man was killed so I was arrested for complicity to murder and I went to jail. That was November 2002. So shortly prior to me going to jail, I kind of had a little introduction to the Christian lifestyle but I didn't really know a whole lot about it.

I went to jail and I was there for several months and I was on a court trip and I met a man. The first man that I met sort of changed my life, the second one was Jesus who totally just changed my life. But that man that I met on that court trip was Jack. In our town, what they do is, just to save on gas or manpower to pay the people, they just get as many people as they can in one car to transfer inmates at one time. I was being transferred from Russell County to Adair County where we were both house. I was in the backseat with him and there were like four guys and me and I was just sort of stuck on

their laps. The partial lap that I was on was Jack's. I started to talk about a book I was reading and I said that it was a boring book and just was trying to have some kind of conversation. He looked at me and he said, "Do you ever try to read your Bible?" Instantly I started crying and he shushed me and told me that he would like to write me.

He gave me a Scripture and I don't remember what it was but from this meeting, we started writing. I knew instantly there was something different about him and I didn't know what it was. Now I know that it was Christ in him that was different. I liked it and he wrote really nice letters and took time to answer every question that I had and I was full of questions and I would write 18-20 pages at a time and he would take time to answer each and every one of those questions. It meant a lot to me that somebody would take time out for me and he honored me in every way. We wrote over the course of essentially ten years. I was incarcerated for 9 ½. Over those years, he directed me and pointed me to Christ over and over and over again. If I had a problem, the answer was Christ. If I was upset, the answer was Christ. It was always Christ. Christ. Christ.

I would look for his letters and wait for his letters. I knew that it would take 3 to 4 days for my letters to get there. It would take him max a day to write me back and then three or four days later I would get a letter from him. So I knew about the time that Jack's letters would come. One day his letter came and I climbed up on my bunk and I was reading it and those of you who know Jack's testimony, he got saved in the Adair County jail in the shower. I was right next door in the cell next door but it was seven or eight years later. I got one of his letters and I was reading it and I don't even remember what it said but it spoke to my heart. God, through him, spoke to my heart. You know, in that moment, it just became personal to me that everything that I had ever done...someone was praying about darkness earlier in the opening prayer and I was thinking to myself that that was me. It wasn't just that I lived in darkness, I was darkness. But I praise God for that light that came into my life because darkness and light cannot coexist. It's impossible.

I was reading over his words and it spoke to my heart and through his words God showed me what a sinner I was and it became real to me that everything that I had ever done was to him. It wasn't to my children, though it was. It wasn't everything that I had ever done: been a disappointment to my father, I had done this to my brothers or family or friends and children. This horrible mother is what I thought that I was. It was so much more whenever I had seen that I had done it to Christ. Then he died for me even though I was still doing these things and it was real. It hit me like a ton of bricks and I stopped reading and I put the letter down and I said, "God, please forgive me." I knew right then that that's what the key was and I'm just so grateful that he revealed to me that I was a sinner that day because that's what it took and I don't think a person can be saved unless he is gracious and merciful enough to show us our state and that we are in direct rebellion against him. That's what he did for me that day.

The change that came after that was remarkable because I didn't even know how to read the Bible. I didn't even know how to look up Scripture. I couldn't look up Scripture so he would send me these letters and he always had Scripture to back it up and I was too

prideful to ask anyone, "What's this Romans and these numbers mean?" So I just kind of figured it out by myself and I realized that John was a book and 3 and the colon after that was the verse. Then I got it and so then I would take the time and I would look up everything that he wrote. But that's how ignorant I was. Had been in that church and no one had ever taught me the way. No one had ever preached the word to me and it just took a man who was in the same position as me, an inmate, to take time out of his life.

I was just so grateful for that because our friendship was built on that and we wrote over the course of ten years and around the beginning of June, Jack wrote me a letter and said, "They calculated my time." I wasn't the calculating type. I did my time. I didn't know what my out date was, didn't care. I didn't have support so it was different, I think, for me. I didn't know where I was going. I didn't know what I was going to do. I had no idea. Essentially, I thought I was going to be homeless when I got out. I had no idea. So Jack calculated his time and he knew exactly when he was getting out and he wrote me and told me and I said, "Well, you know what? I think I should be getting out around the same time as you. I'm really happy for you. I should be out shortly after you." Two days later I got called to the office and I was getting out on June 29, the same day as Jack. Jack and I served out on the same day of prison which is really awesome. Several months later, we got married.

I was in bed the other night and I told him that I know everyone's salvation experience when they come to know Christ is really special to them. I know that but somehow I can't...mine is just so special to me because I'm married to the man that led me to Christ and that is just so unique, I think, and it makes our bond just that much more strong. To look at our past, what we were and what we did to who we are now, man, it's all God. It is all God. There is no way and I'm sure that Jack would not be thinking 15-16 years ago that he would be sitting in a church with a wife and both being saved and speaking about the Lord and living the lifestyle that we do now. Then I can tell you that it is such a wonderful, wonderful thing to know him in a personal, intimate way and I'm just grateful because every single day, I am so blessed and aware of it and I just thank you guys for listening to me and giving this opportunity to share what God has done in my life. I just thank you all.