

My Christian Testimony

By Dave Marney

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I grew up in a family where my father and all of my siblings were atheists. My mother, however, believed in Catholicism as a kind of a "who knows?" insurance policy, so we all attended Catholic school. I was a little unusual in that I was always interested in matters of faith, from my earliest memories.

It was a young nun at the school who first told me that it's not enough to just go through the motions, one has to actually believe. The questions I had about God pestered me all through my childhood.

When I started high school, I interviewed a priest, a rabbi, and a protestant pastor and asked them if they really believed in God. The priest told me yes, he believed, but the important thing was to follow the sacraments, that's what they're there for. The rabbi said no, he didn't believe, but it doesn't matter if God exists or not, it's what you do with your life that matters. The pastor said yes, of course God exists, and you should be looking for hard evidence of it. If God really created the universe, you should be able to see it in the universe. If God really created man, you should see it in historical accounts.

The pastor's answer really struck me. It wasn't enough to convince me to be a believer, but it was enough to give me a way to answer my questions.

Later on, I started socializing with a small group of students who had all become Christians around the same time. Some of them were musicians as I was, and they sang Scripture songs constantly, most of which I can recall word-for-word to this day. They were very different from other students, not quite so caught up in themselves, more thoughtful and kind. A very attractive group.

After I graduated, I got a job as a pianist on tour in Canada. The life of a touring musician sounds glamorous, but it really wasn't for me. Being on the road, separated from everything, working until 3AM every day is a very lonely existence. But I loved the music, it was my life.

After about six months, I started coming back to the States to visit with a young lady of interest from that school group, Janet, who later became my wife. She was a Christian, and so I followed her to church every Sunday at McLean Presbyterian, then meeting in the much smaller facility on Balls Hill Rd.

Every time I would visit, I would run into people like Carolyn Frickel, people just sparkling with the joy of the Lord. It was quite a culture shock. At that time, Janet was going through a very hard time with her family, and was kicked out of her own home. She was adopted on the spot by one of the church families, the Harrises, who became my role model for what a functioning Christian family looks like.

So, when I would visit her, I wasn't just visiting a person or even a church, but an entire family and community of believers. Then I would go back to my job on the road, playing in yet another beer-soaked bar in Canada. It was like God was showing me two very different paths I could take, almost night and day.

So, I left Canada and came back to the States. I started reading the Bible and other Christian books in earnest, because these questions would just not let me go. It took a very long time. I am a hard-headed person.

Finally, I remember sitting in the front pew of MPC one evening just thinking about everything, when a good friend of mine, Jay, who was visiting for the weekend walked up and sat down next to me to say hello. And I just unloaded on him. All the questions I had, everything I had concluded, the Bible passages I had been studying, everything.

And he said to me, Dave, you may think these questions are unanswered, but actually they're not. Based on what you've told me, you are a believer. You are a Christian. You should just pray right now and thank God for everything He has done to lead you to this point and accept it.

When he said that, it kind of stunned me, but I realized he was absolutely correct. God had won my heart over. It had happened very slowly over years and years, but I had passed from death to life.

It took a while to convince Janet and the rest of the people in my life that I was a new person, because I was pretty incorrigible. But it was true. From that point forward, my life took a very different path.

As a child, I had learned how to read music by sitting around my grandmother's dining room table and singing through the Southern Baptist hymnal. My aunt was the director of music at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, and she would take me to church concerts with a score, and help me follow along.

So, my first introduction to music was to sacred music. Later on, I realized that God had been using music to prepare my heart from childhood. I loved music because it combines creativity, intellect, and beauty -- all traits of God Himself, I later realized.

When I became a Christian, I immediately turned my musical interests in a religious direction. I started taking hymns that had wonderful words, but the tune didn't really express them very well, and replacing the tunes with my own melodies. This turned into a lifelong hobby of mine, and over the years I have written a fair number of hymns which I publish at www.newhymns.org.

I've gone through times of great sadness in my life, great difficulty, and I've always turned to music and to hymn writing at those times to work out those emotions and seek the reassurance that God is there and He cares for me.

Looking back on it, the threads are clearly music, which God used to draw me in by beauty; intellectual curiosity, which God used to draw me in by my mind; and friends and church family, which God used to draw me in by loving relationships.

God took me when I felt I was being sucked down into a pit, like in a pit of mud, and He lifted me out and He set me on a rocky ledge. Literally my entire waking life God has been drawing me to Himself.

And that's my story.