

My Testimony: Pastor Brad Winship

My father was raised in a home that was culturally Christian. He attended a Hope College in Michigan, a Reformed Christian college, and he even spent a semester in seminary. My mother was raised Roman Catholic but came to true faith in Christ at a Bible Study being held at Hawthorne Gospel Church. This was my upbringing; I was raised in a Gospel home. Every Sunday we were faithfully sitting in our pew at the First Baptist Church of Hackensack.

What I gained through this was a head knowledge of Scripture. Paul writes to Timothy, "From a child you have known the sacred Scriptures which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15). Knowledge doesn't save, but it is necessary in leading a person to Christ who does save.

Even as a very young child my exposure to church gave me a knowledge and discernment that made me different from my peers. Other children would be fooled by the secular philosophies and allurements of the world, but not me. I could smell the devil a mile away. I had the Biblical world view firmly planted in my mind. Did I live right? Of course not! Knowledge is one thing; the power to do right is another. I learned first hand the words of the Apostle Paul who wrote, "For the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not want" (Romans 7:18-19)

By the way, all those stereotypes people have about being raised in a Christian home are wrong. One doesn't get bored of the Gospel! One doesn't get turned off by familiarity! One doesn't become brainwashed. One doesn't get a one-sided view of the world! On the other hand, children raised in a secular home see only Satan's side. In a Christian home I was able to observe both sides: God's and Satan's. I knew I had something special, and that gave me a profound sense of self worth.

I am certain my Christian faith didn't come by indoctrination. Many of my Sunday School classmates heard the same messages I heard. Many of them had better Christian parents than I had. What surprises me is that today most of them have nothing to do with Jesus Christ. You can't teach a person into becoming a new creation.

The fact that my Christian parents weren't perfect, even hypocrites at times, never turned me away from Christ. Jesus was still true and pure no matter how my parents behaved. If I did not believe, to blame them would only be a convenient excuse. I believe that much of the bad mouthing of the Christian home comes for those who were raised in a Christian home but were never truly converted. Their spiritual blindness causes them to misinterpret the whole experience. Just like the unbelieving Israelites in the exodus, they couldn't stand being stuck with God and Moses in the wilderness for forty years. They saw only what they perceived as bad; they never saw the good.

My conversion:

I never walked the aisle of a church to be saved. I never responded to an emotional appeal by some charismatic speaker. Which for me is a good thing, so that my "faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:5).

As early as I can remember, I knew I was a sinner in need of a Savior. I accepted as intuitive the truth that mankind is evil and that a price must be paid for that evil - - even death, eternal separation from God. It made perfect sense that God would show His love by becoming a man and paying the price for mankind's sin by

dying on the cross. It made perfect sense that God would require faith in the Messiah's work on the cross in order for forgiveness to be applied. Earning salvation by self-righteous works appeared both impossible and prideful. True faith is the only way.

Did I really did have this all figured out when I was about four years old? Absolutely! I believe God made all of these truths intuitive to me. God gave me a disposition that agreed with God about my sin. I find most people don't have this. I am amazed by how many people think they are so good that they will be welcomed with honors into the pearly gates. I have always contemplated the question: why do some people believe they are good enough to earn heaven, and other people consider themselves unworthy. Maybe it all comes down to pride vs. humility, or as Jesus said "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The bottom line was that I believed in Christ, and I wanted to be on His side. Without knowing the exact wording, I was expressing in my heart Romans 10:9 - - "confessing with my mouth Jesus as Lord."

I remember praying every night to the Lord, "Lord, if I am not saved, please save me." I hear this is quite common with people who come to Christ early. Now we all know that one is born again only once, and it is important to have an assurance of salvation. But I believe it is a healthy thing to continually express to the Lord a desire for His salvation. It shows a yearning heart.

But by the time I was 13, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life came flooding into my soul in full force. Although I had enough fortitude to resist the "big bad outward sins", the poison of lust still crept into my heart - - lust for popularity, lust for girls, lust for money, lust for motorcycles, lust for guitar equipment, lust for heavy metal music. And then came the anger, motivated not by an inferiority complex, but by a superiority complex. The problem is not that teenagers dislike themselves; the problem is that teenagers love themselves too much. It was all about me. The root of sin is selfishness. I wanted, and I did not get, so I was angry, disappointed, and without any joy. (See James 4:1-3)

As you could guess, at this time my interest in the Lord Jesus Christ was zero! We live for what we desire, and since I desired the world, Jesus received no attention. I would go along with my sister to the HiBA club at my public High School. HiBA stands for High School Born Againers. Weird name, but this was the 70s. It was a program whereby a Christian adult would set up home Bible studies for public school students. I don't remember any of the studies. I wasn't listening. I was daydreaming and watching the clock. I think back on those days when today I see young people disinterested in church. I know what is going on. They may believe in Jesus the person, but He is not their interest because He is not their Lord.

In the summer following my sophomore year of high school something changed. For some inexplicable reason, the world lost its allure and I had an insatiable desire to be with God again. I know now that the Spirit of God was drawing me to Christ. That summer I spent every evening praying and crying over my sin. I profusely read and underlined my Bible. I even wrote on 3 x 5 cards verses that I thought were important to commit to memory. I remember hearing my first sermon. Oh I had sat through many sermons before, but I never really heard them. That day, my pastor was speaking from James chapter 2. Some may have considered James 2 a boring text, but I was sitting on the edge of my seat because I was born again.

Two weeks before school started I announced to my parents that I would like to quit public school and attend Hackensack Christian School. I wasn't driven by some academic philosophy of Christian education. I simply wanted to learn more about the Lord Jesus Christ and be with His people. My public high school was the proverbial den of iniquity. I had just as well attend a drug invested nightclub as to go back under the tutorship

of my public school. Psalm chapter one tells us that the godly man does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers. This is not a law that the godly man has to follow, this is simply what the godly man does.

(For those of you who wonder about my failure to stay and evangelize other public school kids, believe me, I was not ready to be a witness to anyone. After I was trained and grounded in the faith through Christian School, I was able to do more to evangelize public school young people.)

Was I truly born again when I was 4 years old or when I was 15 years old? I have always wondered about that. At four years of age, I had a desire and a spiritual discernment that could be explained only by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Even in the darkest days of my teen years, “the spirit was willing but the flesh was weak” and I should add ignorant and rebellious.

But it was not until I was 15 that I truly saw my selfishness and ungodliness for what it was, and I truly knew what it meant to make Christ both Savior and Lord. I am almost sure I was saved at age 4; but I know that if I never had the renewal experience at age 15, then my experience at age 4 was anything but salvation. A child who is born again may stumble as the flesh comes of age, but he will never stumble as to fall away from the faith.

Praise and kudos to my parents, to all my Christian friends, to all my teachers at the Christian high school, and to all the faculty at the Christian college because I am amazed how foolish and fleshly I continued to be even after I had given my life to God. At the very least, remembering this helps me to be extremely patient with new Christians.

I am a worm, I am a brute beast, I am a depraved sinner saved by grace, *“for I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.”* (Romans 7:18)

“But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31)