

## Jason Maxwell, Evangelist & Missionary

I have gone to church off and on my whole life. My family went to the Church of Christ up until I was in 2nd or 3rd grade, when all of the sudden we just stopped going. I found out years later that we stopped going because of internal church politics. My parents did not agree with the fact that the church was refusing to let a black family become members of the church. They took a stand, and as a result left the church themselves. Scathed by the religious hypocrisy, we were no longer church goers. Instead it was about our personal relationships with God. I think it the summer between 2nd and 3rd grade, when my Grandma sent me to church camp. It was at camp, that I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and was baptized. When I was in 6th grade, I began going back to church with a friend and his family.

I have attended several different churches off and on throughout my adult life. It seemed to me things would go great for a while, and then it was like I hit a glass ceiling. I would stop growing, and then start losing interest. There was always something missing from the church experience for me.

On Sunday May 23rd of 2010, I attended New Life Christian Center with my brother Mike, and the rest of my family. We were all in town for my nieces' graduation. As I stood there, beside my parents and family, I felt the presence of God like I had never experienced before. It was an amazing and awesome feeling that would prove to change my life forever!

I drove back home to Dallas, where I had lived for the past 15 years. Over the next week all I could think about was God, and this overwhelming feeling that I had to make some serious changes. God was calling me to come back into right standing with him. Up until that point, I didn't really realize I wasn't, or at least I didn't allow myself to think about it.

You see, I thought my life was pretty awesome! I thought I was so blessed, and that God must be pretty happy with me. After all, He kept blessing me with opportunities. What was there to not be happy about.

I knew, I was a "good guy." In both my business and personal life, I tried to treat people fairly, and with respect. I had gone out of my way, so many times, to help those in need. I didn't tithe (10% of all my increases), but I gave money to the church. I tried my best to live by the golden rule and treat others as I wanted to be treated, with love, and compassion, without judgment. I was happy in my committed relationship of 11 years, even though we weren't married. I lived in a beautiful 3,300 square foot home, drove a Lexus SC430, owned the largest Staging company in Texas, was in the middle of filming two pilot episodes for a

new Reality show on Home Staging. I had so many friends. I could barely go anywhere in Dallas without running into someone I knew. I mean how much more could a person want out of life?

The following Saturday, my partner and I were in Austin for another graduation. As he enjoyed time with his family, I continued to struggle with what God had laid on my heart the week before. Finally Sunday morning I broke and told him I was going to drive back to Dallas by myself. As I was driving home, God's calling was so strong, I couldn't get past it. I kept fighting back, saying how do you tell someone who you have loved for 11 years, who was your best friend, who knew more about you than anyone else in the world, that you are leaving them because God told you to? How do you explain to all your family and friends, who have accepted you for who you are, that God wants you to be more? How do you explain to your employees and clients, that you are moving to Centerton, AR because God told you to? The task was so overwhelming, it was impossible! It was nothing I could do on my own, and that was the point.

Over the years life had made me very strong, very proud, and afraid of very little. Years of the world throwing it stones, through emotional traumas, lies, hypocrisy, and judgment has a way of either making, or breaking a person. I had made it! Unfortunately, I had made it on my own determination to prove to the world I was somebody. Now God was asking me to kill my identity, kill everything I was, and follow His will for my life. What God was asking me to do was impossible. I had no choice but to hand it all over to Him, step out in Faith, and let God show me his awesome power.

So I did, when my partner got home Monday, I told him everything that had been going on for the last week. I explained to him, the best I could, that I felt my eternal life was now in jeopardy if I did not listen to God's calling. I was sorry, and I didn't want to leave, but I had to. Within three weeks, having left everything I had known and had worked so hard for. I was living full time in a one bedroom apartment near Centerton, Arkansas.

I started attending every service I could, hoping that God would hurry up and relieve my pain. I laugh now every time I hear someone talk about getting pruned. I always want to shout out how much it hurts when you're going through it. It is not easy when God wants to cut part of you off. But, you have to let yourself die to make room for Him and His will in your life. Thankfully, by the Grace of God, we survive, and it is so worth it! The temporary pain ALWAYS leads to such growth and rewards. I know God still has a lot of pruning to do with me. I pray that one day I will stop crying in protest every time he shows me something that he wants to prune.

I will never forget standing at the alter one Sunday morning, a couple weeks after moving here, crying and praying with my hands raised beside my head. You see, my pride wouldn't let me worship God with my hands totally in the air. I didn't want people looking at me like I was crazy. Anyway, I'm standing there crying, thanking God for all he had done in bringing me this far.

I said "God...you said I was not gay, and that me being gay was not your will for my life. The last time we had this conversation I was 18. I was ready to commit suicide, and you revealed to me that you would rather me be alive and gay, then dead and perish. You said, if I killed myself the devil would have won at that moment. So I stand here today, not understanding why you have called me out of the gay lifestyle now. I have listened, and stepped out in faith, knowing that you have the power to re-wire my brain. You God, have the power to take away every thought, and sexual desire that I have ever had, or experienced. Please replace those with the desires that are in right standing with your word and plan for my life!"

At that moment my hands started shaking and got hot, and my neck tensed up, and my head started to twitch. It scared me to death, not to mention the thought of what people must be thinking. I pressed past those thoughts, and continued to thank God for moving in my life. I claimed the fact he was rewiring my brain. From that moment on, I have never questioned the fact that I am not gay. I know who I am in Christ, and because of that, other people's opinions can't uproot my foundation. I was gay, but my old life died away, and all things became new. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17

People around me question it all the time, you can see it in the looks on their faces, or the tone in their voice. It's almost like they want to see others fail, so that they can say "I told you so!" What I now realize, is how many people the devil has huge influence over their lives, even proclaimed Christians. So many Christians today are so blinded by religious rituals, that they never build a relationship with God. They go to service on Sunday, think they did their thing, and then don't think much about it until the following Sunday. That is not who God calls us to be, or how he calls us to live. If we all abide in God and allow Him to abide in us, I know we would live in a much better world. One where things are on earth as they are in Heaven.

"But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed." Isaiah 53:5

Being healed includes not being ashamed. Shame is the devil's way of convincing us that we are not really totally forgiven. God's Word says he bore our chastisement so that we could have peace. Holding on to shame can also foster fear, which allows the Devil inroads into our lives. The devil uses that shame and fear to keep us from sharing our testimonies, sharing the Gospel, and sharing the true power of God. God wants us to win souls, the devil doesn't!

In June of 2012, I realized that I still had a fear of how people will react to my testimony. I will share my past with anyone in a one-on-one environment, but when Pastor Brian asked me to do a video testimony for the church, the Devil lit into me and did everything he could to prevent me from doing it. He placed thoughts and dreams into my head about all the hurtful things people would say and do through their lack of understanding. Quite honestly, scaring me enough, I almost didn't. But with God living on the inside of me, and with all His strength and power on my side, I know no one can come against me. I know this because the bible tells me so.

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31

"you are from God and have overcome them, He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." 1 John 4:4

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13

God calls us to win souls, and in order to do that we have to continue stepping out in faith every day, pushing our personal comfort levels, breaking down the walls, and planting the seeds. Sharing my testimony is just one way I can step out in Faith.

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! Matthew 7:11

God has given me so many great gifts, but the key is asking and believing in Faith that you have already received them even though they cannot yet be seen. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

In late October of 2010, I was sitting on my back porch feeling pretty down and alone. Outside of my brother and his family, I knew no one in Arkansas. I tried meeting people a couple times at church, but I was so scared I was going to be rejected that I largely became a recluse, which is not my personality at all. As I

sat there with a cigarette in one hand, and a glass of wine in the other, I said God I have given up my whole life as I knew it to follow you, and to be with you, and yet I feel so alone. I need you to send someone into my life to share the world with. I need you to send me a woman, one who will understand where I am at, who will not reject me based on my past, who will love me for who I am, and where I have come from, who will love you the way I love you.

A few days later God sent me Sarah via Match.com. I winked at her...she winked back...a few days worth of casual conversations, and I got her phone number. I texted her one night on my way home from my brothers and asked what she was doing, she was having a glass of wine and asked if I wanted to join her. I drove to her house, which happened to be only two blocks from my house. The two of us sat in her driveway, drinking wine and talking. I had no intention of telling her my past on the first date, but somehow it happened. I now know that it was God showing off again...saying, you said give you someone who would understand, so I did! I mean come on, it takes a pretty amazing woman to be able to handle all that and still want a second date.

On December 10th, 2011 Sarah and I were married and became a family of God, along with Sarah's daughter Hollyn, and my Dog Skyler. I have never been happier in my entire life, I don't have all the money, I don't have the same things, but I do have an amazing wife, an 8 year old daughter, a personal relationship with God. We have an amazing church family at New Life Christian Center with Pastors that are willing to listen to God, deliver the tough messages that change lives, disciple us, and push us.

I know your all sitting there asking why God would grant me what I asked for even though I was drinking and smoking when I asked. Looking back on it how disrespectful! Let just say it is the grace of God (God giving you things you don't deserve), that allows him to meet us where we are. As long as we keep stepping out in Faith and listening to him when he calls, he will always be there. Since then God has pruned Sarah and I. We both stopped drinking and smoking within weeks of getting married. He will continue pruning us, and we will continue listening, learning, seeking, and sharing the gospel. It was through seeking God, by reading the word, that I realized Drunkenness was right there with homosexuality. I had left so much behind to get out of the homosexual lifestyle, a few drinks sure isn't going to keep me from hearing God tell me, "Well done my good a faithful servant."

I want to leave you with this. As Christians, I believe that we are all called to love everyone where they are. We are not called to judge others. The bible says in Mathew 7:1-3 that we will be judged by the degree in which we judge others. God loves everyone, and his will is that not one of us should perish. It is our job

as Christians to love everyone, the way God loves us. Extend grace and forgiveness to those who have wronged us, just as we received forgiveness of our sins through Christ.

All that said, once we become Christians, it is our duty to seek righteousness (right standing with God). We are called to abide in God, and He in us. In order for that to happen we must seek Him through reading the word, prayer, and fellowship. As we seek Him we must remain persuadable to make the changes He is calling us to make. Our ultimate goal should be, to be in right standing with God. We can choose to remain children of God by accepting salvation, but abiding in Him, or we can grow and mature to become the Sons and Daughters of God we are called to be.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says Do you not know that the unrighteous will NOT inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. and such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God.