

Charmaine's Testimony

I was born into a family of non-Christian parents, but came to know about God from a very young age through my Christian grandmother. My parents, who would later separate when I was older, often fought and my grandmother taught me to pray as a means to cope and she too, would pray for me. Apart from that, I had a very little idea of what Christianity was about, who God really was and what He had done for me. My morals, conduct and world-view were shaped very much by my typically Asian upbringing. My parents, well-meaning and loving, taught me only what they knew and believed to be best: the ideals of self-sufficiency, fierce independence and never losing face. My worth was measured by how far I got ahead in the rat-race and my identity built upon the assessment of others.

When I was 11, a classmate invited me to an evangelistic performance at a church. It was at the altar call that the Spirit revealed something of God's love to me. In that one powerful and extremely emotional moment, God made me acutely aware of the sinner that I previously never understood I was, and in the same moment I physically felt like God had cleansed every dirty, sinful and unworthy part from me. I spent the next four days in something of a stupor, often in tears, quite literally drunk with love, pure joy, and an inexplicable sense of spotlessness and newness. In gratitude, I yearned to respond in obedience to God. But as the euphoria waned, so did my resolve to be obedient. With no follow-up after the event, and no church support due to parental objections, I was barely able to make sense of what had happened. I had no qualms calling myself a Christian, as I could not shake the conviction of his reality after that experience. But in reality did not live a life of one at all for the next ten years.

I met Winston in university. He was an extrovert, a party animal, and got drunk every weekend. I was an introvert, extremely studious, self-righteous and allergic to alcohol. Possibly the only similar thing about us were that we were nominal Christians. It wasn't exactly your match made in heaven. Except that it was. When we started dating, one of the first things we experienced together was an incomprehensible mutual desire to commit to God deeply. For us, this was nothing short of a miracle, because evidently neither of us were paradigms of the exemplary Christian. God was clearly calling me, and in His kindness, called me together with my best friend for the ride.

The first few years were painful as we had to grapple with unbiblical preaching at the early churches we attended, sieving right doctrine from wrong and voraciously searching the scriptures for the truth. It was a confusing time, but as I dwelt deeply in His word, those years remain one of the periods in my life where my relationship with God was most intimate. It was in this time that I began to understand and live out the gospel. God showed me that he had ransomed me, and my life was not my own anymore. This meant many major life adjustments and new ways of thinking. My entire world view was changing and what held my life together was now different. No longer was I bound to the value system of this broken world, but I was free under Jesus' lordship of grace. Indeed the old had gone, and the new had come. I found a new capacity in me to love

beyond myself or my immediate circle. My heart broke for new things, the things that mattered to God.

Operating under grace that wasn't always easy—it meant that God could ask anything of me, and a constant acknowledgment that I was broken, sinful and in need of a Saviour. It meant that sin was no longer merely some bad thing I did, but my rebellion that nailed Jesus to the cross. Sin became deeply repulsive, and the weightiness of repentance took on new urgency. It also meant treasuring Him more than His blessings. These were and still are very real challenges to the self-made and material way that I lived. But the Cross reminds me that Jesus has done the most loving thing in the history of mankind for me-- what a joy it is to give my life to such a Saviour. Surely I can trust Him, even when I don't always understand His ways.

Being secure in Christ's love enabled me to be vulnerable with people, something that I previously had an aversion to and even found abhorrent. Through RHC, God has convicted me that in His wisdom, He desires for me to be folded into community, to be committed to his body in order to live out the gospel. I've been truly built up by His body loving and serving me, encouraging/ admonishing me in pointing me to Jesus and I, doing the same for them.

I wasn't saved in any spectacularly dramatic fashion, there was no flash of lightning and I wasn't flung off a horse. I can see now it was just God, patiently, lovingly drawing me to him at every stage in my life. I was not saved by my intellect or ability to make a good religious decision, as my pride often tempts me to believe. I am saved by his relentless pursuit of me, by his death and resurrection alone. It is the same grace that continues to work in me, revealing the areas in my life I need to change, giving me faith and transforming me for His glory. If there were any words that could even sum up this testimony, they would be: in Him, through Him and for Him.