

My Story

(All following scripture is taken from the New American Standard Bible.)

LIFE TESTIMONY OF REX DUVAL

If my life stands for anything it could be summed up in the words of *Romans 4: 17b*, “*even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.*” In other words God does not call me to submit a curriculum vitae to determine where I have been, and therefore where I am going. No, my God is all too aware of my desperately lost condition. *Romans 3: 23* “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” *Romans 6: 23* “*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

I was born in New York City, to Jose Foch Duval and Betty Jane Duval. My father hailed from Cuba and my mother was born and bred locally. My parents were in show business and my father eventually became a famous actor. He played the part of the original Juan Valdez for The Colombian Coffee Federation, and the Federation established a powerful business trading on my father as their representative and brand image.

My parents were not Christians and I grew up in a very combative environment. I do not remember a day in my childhood without yelling or conflict, unless I happened to be away at camp. However, in spite of this tension I knew that they both loved me very much. My parents were just unable to overcome their personal pain, and find a healthy way to express that love to each other and to me. Not to make excuses, but my father had a nightmarish childhood, and well, garbage in and garbage out. Although my mother had loving parents, they were traveling so much that mom really attributes being brought up by her grandmother. So much for quality family life! Today my mother at 88 years old is one of my best friends and a strong believer in Jesus.

My father began committing adultery on their honeymoon with a cigarette girl, and continued to lead a promiscuous lifestyle until my parents were finally divorced when I was 14 years old. I blamed some unknown failure in my character for not being able to hold the family together, especially now that I had a brand new sibling who had just been born, my precious sister Melissa Jane Duval. She was and still is one of the greatest gifts in my life. My mother was in so much pain after the divorce that she took what she thought was an easy way out, and married a wealthy and powerful man in advertising, Arthur Stein. He was publisher of *McCall's Magazine*, then the most widely circulated magazine for women in the world. Arthur was an alcoholic, atheist, (what a mix), and only a few years after my mother married him for financial ease, he lost his job and went broke. My poor mother spent the next 20 years of her life supporting him. *Proverbs 11: 28* “*He who trusts in riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like the green leaf.*”

My real father decided one day that we needed to bond. When I was twelve years old my celebrity dad took me out on the town to do some night club hopping. While in a bar/club called Nepantha, he met some friends, and we were invited outside to “the car.” I will never forget this car! It was a lime green Cadillac Eldorado with a leopard skin roof and white leather interior. Can you imagine I still get dizzy just thinking about it!

Well, on that fateful night my father handed me some cocaine. I still remember as he was passing the tin foil filled with that destructive powder to me in the back seat, he hesitated for a tiny moment. Somehow he knew this was not the example he wanted to set for his only son, but the wheels were already in motion, and he said “just put some up your nose and tell me what you feel?” Well that first jolt was not so much of a chemical rush, as the stripping away of any innocence left in my childhood at my father’s hand. *Proverbs 14: 12* “*There is a way that seems right to a man/woman, but its end is the way of death.*”

So many people who read this story have experienced betrayal at the hand of a parent, relative, friend or lover. Someone you trusted with your heart and who broke that trust by making a terrible decision that negatively impacted your life. It can be so hard to accept, that in the darkness, in the midst of life’s despair, there is still a God who understands and has the power to make a difference. However, this message of God’s love and forgiveness is only revealed through His cross and resurrection. Look honestly at Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, and you will come face to face with your sin, be bold enough to confront your sin in the light of His unconditional love, and you will experience the grace of God’s forgiveness which comes through the resurrection power of God. (*Romans 8:11*)

This is the same power that raised Jesus from the grave over two thousand years ago and is available to anyone who will turn to God today without a personal agenda. Simply turn to God with a childlike attitude that declares, I am a wicked, sinful, a lost person in need of a Savior, and Jesus is His name. *Acts 4: 12* “*For there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other Name under heaven that has been given among men/women, by which we must be saved.*” F.J. Huegel in “Bone of His Bone” describes being born again as, “died to the self-life to rise up with Christ in the power of a new-life.”

My step-father hated me very much but I was just a symptom of his personal loathing. I would remember him coming home each night and slugging down a quart of vodka. In retrospect it was so sad. Then he would become verbally abusive to me as his whipping post. But as I look back God was always there, I just didn’t know how to reach out and touch Him. Even then grace was moving in my life. You see God is sovereign and His grace falls on the just and unjust alike.

Truth be told, who is justified in the eyes of God? Answer, nobody without faith in the Person of Jesus, through His cross and His blood. In *Romans 5: 1* the apostle Paul says *“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* In other words, in God’s economy, only the death and life of His Son pays the purchase price for justification. What beauty, that all we have to do is just believe and receive like a child. Jesus has already accomplished everything we need in God’s eyes, on our behalf. Great deal! He died so we can live! (Please read *Romans 5: 8.*)

At sixteen my step-father threw me out of the house. I will never forget that night. At that moment I didn’t feel God’s presence, but now I know that even then, God was watching over me, *Psalm 56: 8a “Thou hast taken account of my wanderings; and put my tears in Thy bottle.”* Sure is good to know that we have a God who delights in becoming intimate with us in every area of our lives, that He even collects our tears. Nothing goes unnoticed. (Please read *Matthew 10: 30.*)

Well, moving from a large house in Greenwich Connecticut, to a small room in a filthy hotel was a real shock. I started having migraine headaches that were so painful my only relief was to hit my head against the hotel wall, and for a split second the shock of the wall neutralized the pain of the headache.

Yikes, I was in some serious shape!

Psalm 91: 15 “He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him, and honor him.” I must admit at the time, it felt like anything but a divine hand moving and covering my life, but God would show Himself in His time many years later, and He is never late. *Habakkuk 2: 3 “For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal, and it will not fail, though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay.”*

I graduated high school because none of my teachers could live with the thought of me coming back another year. I think it was a matter of their self-preservation. By this time I was running around with every girl I could get my hands on, getting high regularly, gambling extensively, and just acting out my pain any way I could.

I watched my father destroy his marriage using gambling as a vehicle that ran him deep into personal debt. So in my warped thinking I determined hey, if it’s good enough for my dad, it must be good enough for me. Children follow their parents in the good, the bad and the ugly. *Proverbs 22: 6 “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.”* Ideally, parents create an attractive example, which internally motivates the child to know God, rather than externally compelling the child, as if it were merely about more rules and regulations. God’s all embracing love is the only true foundation for lasting relationship.

After graduation I went off to school at Cochise College, an excellent college in Arizona. This is where I really began dealing and taking drugs seriously. You see my roommate's father was the Federal court judge in the border town Nogales, and as shipments of drugs were confiscated by some of the profit minded Federal agents, they would kick back the drugs to us, and we would sell them on campus and split the profits. This became a very lucrative business.

Anyone who tells you on the surface that wickedness is not profitable or fun is a liar or an idiot. However, the fun never lasts, and seems to disappear all too suddenly with a bang! This sort of fun is like the best friend who deserts you in a fight. I also did that once to someone when I was eight years old, and even as a young child the disgust of my betrayal affected me so deeply that it remained with me throughout my adult life, and I would never again run out on a companion under fire. It may have served to help make me the fiercely loyal friend I have become to those I consider close.

I lasted approximately five months in college and was tossed out of school because my girl-friend became pregnant. She just happened to be the local fire-chief's daughter. After leaving school she fell down some stairs and had a miscarriage. My life was a complete disaster!

From there I went out to California to live with my Aunt and Uncle who were Christian Scientists. They believed that there was no such thing as sin, and that all evil was basically wrong thinking resulting from an erroneous state of mind. It didn't take me long to make illicit drug contacts and begin selling drugs in sunny Southern California.

At this point I was certifiably insane! I was sleeping with several different women each week, profiting off selling narcotics, stolen cars, collecting money for other drug dealers with a gang of martial artists I had set-up, and robbing banks with an escaped convict and master forgerer. I had several felony arrests but miraculously no felony convictions. Now that is mercy! (*Please read: Hebrews 4: 16*)

Many around me living a similar lifestyle paid a much heavier price regarding life and liberty. They did nothing worse than I had done, and in most cases were not nearly as bad. However, God had other plans for my worthless life. It is not that God loved them any less or that I was so special, it is just that He knew one day I would live for His glory and His alone. You see Jesus' invitation is for anyone who will come. I just responded by His grace, to His invitation, and came. *Matthew 11: 28 "Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."* It seems so simple, but our pride makes His invitation so hard to accept. (*Please read I Peter 4: 8.*)

One of the true beauties of life with God is that things have never gone too far in the wrong direction, for Him to put the fix on them, after all, He works from the realm of omnipotence (all power). Regardless of how long you have been broken, or despite how hurt you are, God is greater still. This is good news for those who have the courage to acknowledge just how much pain they are in, and accept God's unchanging, unconditional love as the answer.

Luke 1: 7 reads, "And they had no child because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years." You see most people just figure it is too late. However, in verse 25, just before their son John The Baptist is born, Elizabeth says, "This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when he looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men." The dignity in man's soul, is lost through disobedience and sin, and is only regained through the cross of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice on our behalf. Only when life's very purpose is found in the cross and death of Jesus, do we begin to realize the cost of God's provision. Saved at last!

After selling drugs for several years I finally came to the end of my rope, through a series of failed business deals and investments. I went from living in a mansion in Beverly Hills to becoming homeless on the streets of Los Angeles. Vividly, I remember calling one of the contacts that purchased drugs from me on several occasions for help. I asked him for a blanket and he said, "I am in the middle of a party, and it is not a propitious occasion for me to be interrupted," and he hung up! So that night I slept behind his building on a chaise lounge by the pool. And just when I thought things couldn't get much worse, it rained all night. While we are on this earth things can always get worse!

Charles Spurgeon says about God's character, "immutable veracity cannot demean itself by a lie, and eternal faithfulness cannot degrade itself by neglect." In other words, everything God says is contingent on God alone, His character, His word, His promises. He cannot lie because as *Hebrews 13: 8* says, "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.*" He cannot desert His children because as Paul said in *Romans 8: 38-39* "*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" God has made a sovereign choice to love us and to stick with us, once we confess His only begotten or unique Son Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we instantly experience His full salvation.

Through what I thought was just good fortune, but now I know was God's provision, I ran into my last remaining friend Sharon Presser, who took pity on me and invited me to come and live in her home. She was a peach.

My last drug deal almost cost me my life. The crew I was selling drugs to set me up for a rip-off. I was standing in the dining room, near the sliding glass door of Sharon's home leading to the backyard. A large man, holding an even larger gun, a Smith and Wesson 357, with a six inch barrel, jumped through my door and pointed the piece at my head, cocked the hammer, and started screaming frantically for my money and drugs. Unfortunately for me, I didn't have any money or drugs at the house to give him.

When you are faced with death and apart from God, so many things fly through your mind, and at that moment, you would do anything not to die, because somehow your soul knows God will not receive you with open arms. As this was happening, I remember speaking a mile a minute as I was pleading for my miserable life. All of a sudden, my life, that I had been so careless with, seemed to possess irreplaceable value.

You see as I look back on that incident, I realized that I wasn't ready to die, because somehow, I knew that my life had been a lie, and that was my greatest fear. Living and dying without a sense of ever fulfilling any deeper purpose. There just had to be more!

After a few minutes of insanity, my assailant went to hit me over the head with his gun. My natural reaction was to block the blow, and as the gun jerked upwards, it scraped my forehead with the large sight cutting my head. Simultaneously the gun went off, and with the explosion, my head began squirting blood. I think he thought he had shot me, and, frightened, he ran out the sliding door and up the hill. At this point I bolted upstairs and grabbed my gun, and started chasing him, exchanging shots back and forth.

During the pursuit a voice spoke clearly to me and actually cut through my haze. "Rex, if you don't get out now next time you're dead!" It was so clear, so definite. The voice scared me more than my attacker. I remember my arms going limp, dropping the gun to my side, turning around with blood dripping into my face, and walking back to my porch, while his bullets still whistled past my head. For all I knew, God may have had an angel who was an excellent shortstop catching the oncoming hail. It was as if I went into some sort of zone, and the fear of what I had just heard somehow overrode what was actually happening. That makes no sense naturally, but at that point what else did?

As I stumbled back into the house my enemies were just leaving. I realized instantly that they had set me up when nobody acted surprised or even asked how I was feeling. That really made me sick. I grabbed a towel and made my way to the hospital for some stitches and medication. That was the last time I attempted to turn a drug deal. God had gotten my attention! It is hard to imagine, but it was the first time I had ever been scared enough to consider quitting my sordid life. Sinful behavior of any sort continued over time dulls our senses and only confirms our own self-destructive tendencies.

The first thing I did when I returned from the hospital was call my drug dealing partner, my father, and tell him I had had enough. I remember him laughing and asking me what else I knew how to do, and I must admit I didn't have a ready answer. I just knew that if I ever did another drug deal I was a dead man and at this point in my life that was not an option.

Shortly after this incident I was attending a party, and after being up for several days snorting cocaine with my girlfriend, something happened that would impact the rest of my life. On the morning of the third day there were two bowls of white powder on the table. One was cocaine and the other was a hallucinogenic called horse, named horse because it was actually a horse tranquilizer. It was very powerful and only required an amount equivalent to a match-head to make the user extremely high.

The woman who owned the house hated me for reasons I will not bore you with, and when I asked her which bowl the coke was in she pointed to the horse. Well of course, I wasn't smart enough to think she might want to kill me, and I just began shoveling the horse up my Romanesque nose.

I was holding a bowl of cereal, when all of a sudden I started falling backwards. I thought everything had gone into slow motion, as the cereal and milk were somehow floating above me, each drop-each piece, all seemingly suspended in space. Please don't let your children try this at home. And in the background I thought I heard my girlfriend yelling "he is odi-ing, he is odi-ing, give me the spoon." Bless her heart; she had the presence of mind to use the spoon to suppress my tongue so I didn't swallow it. Go Linda!

Linda told me later that my heart had stopped, and as I was turning blue they put me into a tub of ice. She said they didn't want to take me to the hospital because they all would have been incriminated in taking drugs. I thought afterwards, what would have happened if I had just croaked? Hello!!! Finally, as I regained consciousness and found the strength to take my head out of the toilet, where I had now deposited most of the poison, as well as anything else I had in my stomach, I literally crawled out toward living room.

Barbara who had just tried to kill me was sitting on the sofa casually reading her latest romance novel. As I dragged my pitiful self toward the doorway of her living room, I asked her, "What happened?" And she answered with a big grin on her face, "I just tried to kill you. Shucks, guess I blew it!" As I looked at her and realized what had just taken place, it was like looking the devil right in the eyes. I remembered how vulnerable I felt as I crawled back to her bedroom, hoping she would not get the urge to finish the job in my weakened condition.

After I left Barbara's apartment the next day with Linda, we went to a local restaurant to get something to eat, I would soon discover that I had had a complete mental and nervous breakdown. As soon as Linda and I entered the restaurant I became extremely paranoid. When we were seated and the unassuming waiter came to the table to take our order, I remember looking at him and just freaking out, telling Linda I could not do this and running back to the car. For quite some time after that I couldn't go into any crowded public places, as I started hallucinating and experiencing panic attacks without any artificial inducement. It took several months for me to function again on my own, and about that time, Linda had had enough of my madness and she split the scene.

I needed somewhere to go immediately so I called some acquaintances of mine. They were high-class hookers, what a contradiction in terms, in other words, they worked from a black-book as opposed to working off the street. They said "Rex, come and move in with us, and we will take care of you." I gratefully accepted their kind invitation, and moved into their lovely apartment in Beverly Hills. They began giving me approximately \$150 to \$300 dollars a day, and all I had to do was keep them safe and encouraged when they were home. I could eat bonbons all day and never get off the sofa.

Then one afternoon I had this bright idea. I told them they needed to stop turning tricks, and go out and secure legitimate jobs. I remember them staring blankly into my face, incredulously, and then just smiling.

That same afternoon I went out for a few hours, and upon my return there was a note on the pillow saying, "Although we think you are taking good care of us, and appreciate all you are doing, we think that you have lost your mind." So that was the end of that! They were gone!

My money was running out, and things were looking dark, but God's plan for me was beginning to come to light. I was down to my last sixty dollars and went to the bank to withdraw twenty. While in line I had eye contact with a beautiful blond, we smiled at each other and eventually struck up a conversation. You see I have always loved beautiful women, and God knew just the right bait to get my attention. After all He is a fisher of men. We exchanged some meaningless pleasantries, and then according to my modus operandi, I tried to put some moves on her and asked her for a date. She replied, "Do you know Jesus?" I admit, the first thought that popped into my head was a Mexican guy that I used to buy drugs from named Jesus, but somehow I guessed that wasn't the fellow. So I just said "I don't think I know the one you're talking about."

Her name was Pam, and she invited me to a meeting the following week at a church uptown, called Hollywood Presbyterian. Actually the gathering was in the adjacent building called Wylie Chapel. Next Friday rolled around, and I started out toward the church where we were to rendezvous, with a dozen red

roses in hand and evil schemes in my heart. *Jeremiah 17: 9 “the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can know it?”*

I barely had enough money to eat but I had to bring those roses. We guys can be so crazy when it comes to fulfilling our sexual lusts and fantasies. So there she was waiting for me on the church steps. Boy what a set-up God had in-store for me. I am so glad that God loved me enough to never give up, and that no one is ever too far gone for God to reach. That is worth repeating! *John 3: 16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever (that’s you and me), believes in Him shall have everlasting life.”* The implication here is that God loved us first, it was His sovereign choice, and had nothing to do with our past or present.

Pam invited me inside and we took our seats. A woman evangelist came out and began speaking about Jesus as if He were alive and right there in the sanctuary. I had been brought up in Lutheran schools, baptized and confirmed Lutheran, much like being Catholic.

Sorry, Martin Luther, but I don’t think I had ever really known Jesus personally, or understood that a personal relationship with Jesus through the supernatural power of God is the only way one can become a Christian. This is not religion but relationship with God. (Please re-read *Acts 4: 12.*)

The evangelist said that by God’s grace defined as, “His undeserved or unmerited favor toward man,” we could repent for our sins, and accept His only Son’s sacrifice as our own personal payment for those sins. *Ephesians 2: 8-10 “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

In salvation God exerts His power that transforms all who call on His Name, and calls our spirits out of darkness and into His marvelous light. *1 Peter 2: 9 “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”*

After the preacher, Rev. Patti Damus, finished the message, she invited anyone who wanted or needed prayer to come up. Pam looked at me and said “I am going up why don’t you come with me?” All I could think about was how I was going to put my moves on her and maneuver her into bed that night.

More of God’s good news is that He takes us just as we are. He does not set-up any rules that in our lost condition would be impossible to follow, nor does He command us to make any preliminary changes in our lives before He saves

us. It is God and God alone, and He knows we are impotent without Him. He knows we are incapable to deliver ourselves from sin and the chains that bind us. This is precisely why Jesus had to come! This next verse describes the larger picture and sequence of God's grace, as well as anything in scripture. *II Corinthians 8: 9 "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."*

Well Pam went up before me, and as I was sitting in my seat plotting, I decided I had to go up or she would think I was a sissy, and I would never be able to get my way. So as I began to rise off the wooden pew a peculiar thing happened.

Before I tell you this, I want to preface the experience by stating clearly that this was how God touched me, and although He uses the same cross to save all of us, the experiences can vary widely. With me He used drama because that is who He created me to be, and He could reach me through the dramatic, where others might be frightened away. I was scared right into His arms.

As I started to rise my legs froze. I hadn't done any drugs in weeks and still I felt out of control. Immediately I broke out into a sweat from head to toe.

Finally, I wrenched myself from the pew, by this time my pants were soaking wet, and as I jumped up they made a ripping sound as they stuck to the wooden bench. I glanced at the seat in horror, and for one brief moment, I thought my pants might still be glued to the bench. Thankfully, embarrassment is not part of God's redemptive plan. He redeems us from the curse by becoming the curse for us. Amazing!

I stood next to Pam I was soaked, and later she would explain that God's hand had begun touching my life. At this point I looked like a wet rat, and I figured all bets were off for tonight. When the minister looked into my eyes she said, "Oh, you don't know Jesus do you!?"

Rev. Patti saw right into my soul and it was inhabited, but not by The Lord. She asked to pray for me and I remember saying, "If you have to." She prayed a simple prayer, "Lord please remove the scales from this man's mind, in Jesus' Name."

The following week was amazing. Because of the drug overdose I had experienced several months prior, I could not connect two ideas together without losing my train of thought. I was in an endless mental fog. But each day Pam would call me and read the bible to me. As she read I felt my head banging with the same type of migraines that I experienced years ago in my hotel room in Connecticut.

I was trying to lure Pam over to my apartment, but God protected her and she

wouldn't come. However, she called me every day and read to me for hours while I was experiencing migraine headaches. Finally, she read *Isaiah 53: 8-11* "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares The Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."

Then a miracle happened! Through all the confusion and disorientation in my damaged brain, I actually remembered something clearly. All my life I had believed in some sort of higher power, but could never really define who that power was. I believed there was one God but many ways to reach Him. This basically is what Buddhism teaches and what many in America called the New Age Movement.

All of a sudden I realized that I was only half-right, and that made me all wrong! What I had heard Pam reading was that God was personal and thoughtful, and that His plans and His ways were not to be found in my limited experiences or understanding. All of a sudden I realized I had been deceived, and had desperately tried to manipulate everything to suit me according to what sounded good, something that I could accept without any personal change.

Like lightening, the thought that I could find God on my own became the ultimate arrogance. To control God just like I wanted to control everything else in my wicked self-centered life became preposterous. What a light or as Christians call it, what a revelation!

Shocked, I had come face to face with my true self, apart from a completely holy God in whom there was no sin. In what seemed like an instant I stood revealed in the purity of His character, reflected in the light of His cross and love. *1 John 1: 5* "And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."

Pam invited me to return to the chapel the following Friday and this time although seeing her again was delightful, I was also longing to have the emptiness in my heart filled. Blaise Pascal the French philosopher said, "Man was created with a God shaped void in his heart that can only be filled by His Creator." This emptiness he suggested would cause a person's heart to continue to wander, until Jesus comes in by His Holy Spirit and fills the space.

God in His wisdom allows this sense of something missing to exist in all of us, or few would ever come to know Him. We are conformed so easily by our longing for the comfortable life, as we lose ourselves in the false promises and

deceptions of this world. Our carnal thinking is fueled by selfish choices and sinful habits.

Life outside of God feels so natural sometimes, but in the long run is so lonely and painful. *Proverbs 16: 25* “*There is a way that seems right to a man but its end is the way of death.*” Substance and meaning is only found in the living Person of Jesus and the eternal life that He offers right now.

I returned the following Friday with a companion of mine who was also searching for the truth, and after Rev. Patti spoke, she again extended the invitation to come up front for prayer. This time I remember leaving Pam in the pew and practically running up to the front of the church. My friend followed me and also gave his heart to Jesus. God was already using my life for His purposes, to share His kingdom with others who were also lost.

Rev. Patti looked into my eyes, she remembered my friends from the week before. She asked me if I wanted Jesus, and I remember releasing a sigh and saying, “Yes, oh yes.” She led me in prayer and asked me to simply repeat after her, not praying to her, but with her to God. I confessed Jesus with my mouth and believed in my heart that He had risen from the dead. I knew I was a sinner, lost in my sins, and in desperate need of a Savior, and then I invited Jesus into my heart and life. She said that Jesus was the only one whose death could satisfy God’s price for my salvation and for anyone who would trust in Him, regardless of what they had done. I believed He rose from the dead conquering death and hell, and I asked Jesus to come and live inside of me and to take over my life.” I prayed all this in Jesus’ Name.

Later I realized I had prayed God’s word found in *Romans 10: 9-10* “*That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness (or right relationship with God) and with the mouth a person confesses, resulting in salvation.*” At the very moment I pronounced these things with childlike faith, I was converted by the power of God. I could deeply sense God’s love and forgiveness for me, and my cold heart just melted in His sweet Presence.

“Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.” You see nobody had to explain how bad I was, because in my heart and life, I had rivaled Paul as the chief of all sinners. By the way, I don’t think any of you really need to know all the sordid details of my past life, but they went even further than anything I have already described. I think you get the picture. As we say at The Bowery Mission, “God saves from the gutter-most to the utter-most.”

As of August 2013, I have been saved and walking with Jesus for 37 years. This

in itself is a miracle! Please understand that when you are saved everything that was a challenge before-hand doesn't necessarily disappear. It is not that your circumstances change in the light of God's grace, but rather that we are changed into His image, and as we are transformed, the weight of our circumstances are now violently thrown onto God's shoulders. As I am changed by God and I begin to see my life through His eyes, and everything around me changes. *Romans 8: 2 "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death."* This is a profound mystery only understood in the light of His cross and resurrection.

This radical change because of Jesus' grace can impact the stress level in a believers' life immediately, especially if we understand that as Jesus' death broke the power of sin it also breaks the power of stress, which is rooted in sin and faithlessness. We no longer have to fight in our own strength! *II Corinthians 3: 17-18 "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord the Spirit."*

As we identify ourselves with Christ in His crucifixion, and place all our past, present and future on the cross with Jesus, our lives in His hands, we begin to experience the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, and are made to become just like Him. It is in this transformation into His exact image, where we begin to experience the meaning of true freedom. The freedom of the heart! *John 8: 36 "If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."* What good news!

I remember many years ago, I was involved weekly in a prison ministry, and had the privilege to visit a young boy of fifteen years old in juvenile hall in downtown Los Angeles. He told me a horrific story about his childhood, and how he had landed in jail because he and some friends had stolen a car. I shared with him how Jesus had come into my life, and he asked if we could get on our knees together and pray for Jesus to come into his life. We did, and the following week when I came back to visit him again, he said that the same night he prayed to invite Jesus into his life, he went back to his cell and when the lights went out, and the doors slammed shut, he didn't cry because he knew his heart now belonged to Jesus. That is the converting power of God! His heart was set free! His life instantly changed!

Almost immediately after I became a Christian God began restoring my mind. Please find a bible and read (*I Corinthians 1: 24-31*). Remember, God does not need wholeness to bring about wholeness! He knows the parts that are missing, and what will define wholeness, holiness, from His perspective. Most of the time that is quite different from what I think

my life should look like, however, as I grow in the knowledge of His unchanging goodness, I begin to trust His choices for my life as the best possible solutions. This is the process of walking and living free, called sanctification in the bible.

As I have grown in my relationship with Jesus I have realized many things, but one that I feel compelled to share with you can be found in chapter five of Josh McDowell's book, "More Than A Carpenter." It talks about the evidence to support the literal resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Remember I said earlier, that when life is about to be extinguished, and you don't have peace with God, life can become very sacred, very quickly, because you know innately that you are just not ready to die.

Well the title of chapter five is, "Who Would Die for a Lie." And the premise of this chapter surrounds one undeniable fact. That all of Christ's disciples; who historically walked with Him, ate with Him, lived with Him, and watched Him do all His miracles, ultimately ran for their lives when He was arrested and crucified as most normal men would. Three days later however, they came out of hiding no longer feeling the need to protect their own safety, returned to Jerusalem, the very place where Jesus had been arrested only a few days earlier and crucified.

They began to preach that this Jesus the authorities crucified had been raised from the dead. Jesus appeared over and over again to the disciples that knew Him intimately, as well as others ranging from small groups to some well over 500 people for a period of over 40 days. All any detractor had to do was to produce Jesus' corpse and all the buzz regarding the resurrection would have stopped once and for all, but nobody could because the tomb was empty! *1 Corinthians 15: 6 "After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of who remain until now, but some have fallen asleep."*

Josh states, "All of Christ's disciples went on to die horrible deaths; Peter crucified, Andrew crucified, Matthew killed by the sword, James, son of Alphaeus crucified, Philip crucified, Simon crucified, Thaddaeus killed by arrows, James, brother of Jesus stoned, Thomas spear thrust, Bartholomew crucified and James, son of Zebedee killed by the sword, John was exiled to the island of Patmos until his death after being tortured severely.

All through history men have gladly given their lives for what they believed to be true, but you would be hard pressed to find those in their right mind, that gave their lives for something they knew was a lie." Josh says, "The response that is usually chorused back is: Why, a lot of people have died for a lie; so what does it prove? Yes, a lot of people have died for a lie, but they thought it was the truth. Now if the resurrection didn't take place (i.e. was false), the disciples knew it. I find no way to demonstrate that they could have been

deceived. Therefore these eleven men not only died for a lie—here is the catch— they knew it was a lie. It would be hard to find eleven people in history that died for a lie, knowing it was a lie.”

Before I close, I am compelled to tell you what happened to my father. After I had become a Christian the only thing I wanted from my father was for him to acknowledge how he had messed up my life, and then I would be done with him. But, you guessed it, God had other plans.

After I moved back to New York, I was in prayer one morning, praying grand prayers, such as, “oh God make me like Jesus.” The Holy Spirit said, “Okay, you have to forgive your father.” I said, “anything but that!” Instantly, I realized that this was at the root of not only my father’s salvation, but the continuing process of my healing.

Then in another instant, I determined that what God had asked me to do was impossible in my own strength. I could only turn to Jesus for help. God calls the Christian to live a supernatural lifestyle that can only be accomplished in complete surrender, and childlike faith in Jesus. He creates circumstances that drive us to depend solely on Him. Jesus says in *John 15: 5* “*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.*”

Well, for the next year almost to the day, each morning I would pray and ask God to help me forgive my father. God knew that left to my own devices I was swallowed up in this mammoth task. Then one day something occurred to me. The Holy Spirit spoke to my mind and said “my sin against God was greater than my fathers’ sin against me.” At first I was shocked, and then I realized, this was God’s answer, and now I was ready to receive it.

I fell on my knees and asked God to show me more. Then after a year of praying each day about this great challenge, I felt released from the chains of bitterness toward my father. *Hebrews 12: 15* “*See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many are defiled.*”

I knew that I had to put what I just experienced to the test. Each time I spoke with my father he would push my buttons, and I would hang up the phone fuming mad. So I called him in Los Angeles, and as I heard his voice, I already knew something was different. As he started trying to infuriate me I realized it was not working. My soul had been set free.

I was filled with a mingled sense of love and sadness. As I said goodbye, I knew

I was healed, and that once again God had moved miraculously in my life. No longer did I need him to say he was sorry, or that he had ruined my life and should assume responsibility. It felt as if a giant weight had been lifted from my shoulders and now it was time for God to carry the load. Jesus said in *Matthew 11: 29-30* “*Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your soul. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.*”

I began praying for my father’s salvation every day, and many years later, while on a visit to Los Angeles to see him, something amazing happened. One day he turned to me and said “nobody knows how messed up you were like I do, because I’m the one who messed you up. And nobody knows the change in your life like I do. How do I get Jesus into my life as well?” I thought I was going to fall over. I don’t remember what I said, but we just began crying in each others arms for several minutes. Then we prayed a simple prayer, and my father asked Jesus to come into his life and be his Saviour. Words will never be able to describe what I felt at that moment.

My father began attending “The Church On The Way” with me and was water baptized by Pastor Jack Hayford, then after a short while dad was also baptized in The Holy Spirit. What a transformation! He was a new creation in Christ. *II Corinthians 5: 17* “*Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, all things have become new.*”

Today I live with my precious wife Joy of 22.5 years, our fine son Rex II, 20 years old and our beautiful daughter Lexie, 17 years old. God continues to surprise us with His goodness and unfailing love. The one primary fact that I am continually reminded of by God’s Holy Spirit, is that it was the cross that saved me those many years ago. Today, it is still the same cross that fills me daily with the knowledge of my sin, salvation, and the transforming power released in Jesus’ cross and resurrection. (Please read *I Cor. 2:2*)

F. J. Huegel in “Bone of His Bone”, which I highly recommend says, “I must be born anew. That is why Christ took me with Himself down into the grave and brought me forth a *new creation*. He terminated my old life when there upon the cross as Representative Man He died; and He imparted to me a new life when He rose from the grave.” Christ expects nothing from the ‘flesh.’ However religious its garments, however holy its appearance, however sanctified its undertakings, it still ‘profits nothing.’ It is still only ‘flesh.’ It is still only the realm of the natural. It is still only ‘self.’

“The believer, too, becomes God-possessed. He, too, as a partaker of Christ’s resurrection, comes under the sway of the supernatural. It is not simply Christ dying for the sinner—it is the sinner dying in Christ! It is not simply Christ being raised from the dead—it is the believer being raised along with his Divine Head! It is not simply man reaching out after God—it is God taking the form of

man and then, as the 'Son of Man,' changing life's entire process: subjecting it to the cross for the extinction of that great monster which has been the source of all corruption, the root of man's misery, namely, the principle of self; and bringing men and women out from the tomb charged with the Life of the Ages—resurrection life! This is the Christian faith—the faith of the apostles, the 'faith of the Son of God. "

Galatians 2: 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

In closing remember that it is not what you give God that will ever hurt you, but rather what you decide to hold back, regardless of your reasons. This is the only place that the enemy will ever be able to secure a foothold in your life. So surrender today to Jesus and begin living the life that only comes through the cross, blood and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Blessings for Life,

Pastor Rex