

A Mighty Change of Heart

This year, in March, I discovered a shocking fact about my mother. She has been a believer in Jesus for 56 years. I call it a shocking fact because I had no idea. There was NO mention of Jesus Christ in my home growing up. Over the last few months the two of us have been engaged in an ongoing spiritual discussion for the first time. She admitted she had been a closet Christian her whole life. In July of this year I finally asked her why. She told me that in her house growing up with her mom and stepdad there was no religion and her home. One year she attended a church camp with her cousins when she was nine years old and accepted Jesus as her Savior. When she came home she was told not to speak about it or she would no longer be allowed to attend the camp again. She began walking one mile to church on Sunday's by herself to attend services at a tiny Methodist church near her elementary school. She quietly continued on in her faith, by herself for 4 years, and went to Church camp through high school.

The older she got, and as she became a mother, she had decided that the work of searching for and attaining a "deeply personal relationship" with God was an individual one. She decided that it was up to her children to create that relationship on their own. She felt that one cannot force a relationship to be made with God. She felt that it needed to be a goal WE sought for and chose on our own. She tried to introduce us to as many spiritual choices as possible.

By the time I was in college I studied Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. There was such a deep resonating truth to much of what I had learned. I told my mom at Thanksgiving I wanted to move across the world and become a Buddhist nun; she didn't even flinch. Little did I know, at the time, her heart was praying that"this too shall pass." Lucky for me I had already found my future husband and that was going to put quite a kink in my plans. Instead I moved on to marriage and children. We did not attend church services of any kind, but had our children blessed in the LDS Church out of respect for my husband's family. However, at another time we also had them blessed by an Apache medicine man in Arizona with my mom. (My mom is an Assiniboine Sioux Indian)

It was about this time but my eyes began to open. The words given in the LDS blessing from my husband's Uncle and the words of Delmar the medicine man were distinctly identical. I remember dropping my jaw opening my eyes and looking around in shock.

Eventually we began, after the birth of our second daughter, to attend on and off in an LDS ward in our neighborhood in Colorado. We began to attend regularly after moving to Idaho. At the same time living my life, in the closet, as a non-believer in Jesus Christ. The Father I had a testimony of, but the Son was just someone that "other" people

believed in. In all, we attended about six years. In the beginning, I read the Book of Mormon more for curiosity. Then I began to read daily because I could see fruits appear in my life as I searched in earnest to find my path. I went through all the motions, church attendance, daily scripture study, our children attended activities and we had family home evening. I knew there was something there, but something else was also missing. I could hear truths, I could see fruits in my life, but there were times when I would look up to the heavens in Sacrament meetings and wonder why in the world the Father had led me there.

It was after meeting with two lovely couples from the Boise fellowship for dinner that I prayed to the Father to ask a question. I such a bold and undeniable physical response that I was in shock for about 48 hours. The only conclusion that I could reasonably make was that, in fact, even though I had spent a great deal of my life denying him, Jesus was real. It was at that moment that I became a Christian. This is going to sound harsh, but I spent six years in the LDS Church being led tothe LDS Church. It was Denver Snuffer who led me to a belief in, and faith in Jesus. I was later baptized, for the very first time, in the Boise River in September 2015. For a great deal of time after that, I was racked with the consciousness of guilt that I had ever abused Christs laws. I've spent countless hours repenting for my harsh and shame filled judgments of Christians as a whole.

I had focused too much on MY "perceived dichotomy" of the modern-day Christian. And that was, being Christian in "name only" and being Christian "In deed." Now I am learning to forgive them, love them, and see them as my brothers and sisters seeking Christ. There has been a "Mighty Change of Heart" in my life. My talk today is about this change and the individual effort it takes, along with Jesus, to walk in his ways. Individual preparation of our hearts is so essential for the Christian soul. To me, becoming a Christian meant a conscious effort to follow His path.

In Mosiah Ch 5, we read about our HEARTS that need to change if we want to be called the "Children of Christ." They change with His help, but with our effort. We must close our eyes from the world around us and open our spiritual eyes inward, and look at our own imperfections and weaknesses, and actively work to change ourselves. This requires cognitive awareness, action, physical movement and choice, combined with our energy as well as prayer.

As a new Christian, I began to read the Bible for the first time, I had no experience with it. I decided to read it with my children and start at the New Testament. Since it was with my kids I decided to read the New International Version a friend gave me seven years earlier. We read every morning before school to better help us all have understanding and experience with it. As I have feasted upon the words of Christ as a new believer, I have seen his words with the eyes of my previous studies and

understandings of eastern philosophies. I see so many similarities that are mirrored with Christ's teachings and truths.

I couldn't help but have a real attachment to Paul. Since he and I had both been on similar paths and had been converted to Jesus in our hearts. I just love the way he addresses his letters. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. When we made it into Philippians, there was one sentence in the intro that really stood out to me. It read, "this is the NEW way to be human that is revealed in God's kingdom."

By the time we finished reading it, I thought there was so much light and truth in it that I needed to take notes and ponder and reflect on those short 4 chapters. I felt like Paul helps to direct the early Christians on how to "walk in the ways of the Lord." In the first chapter, Paul's prayer for the Believers in the colony of retired Roman soldiers is the same prayer I have for all of us.

That our love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight to discern what is BEST. That we may be righteous, pure, and blameless. That we may preach Christ out of love and goodwill. And that we will seek to exalt Christ in our lives.

In chapter 2, he tells us to be like-minded with Christ having the same love, and being ONE in the spirit and OF ONE mind. Paul urges the early Christians to do everything without grumbling and arguing. To do nothing out of vain conceit. And in humility, value OTHERS above ourselves, not looking to our own interests, but each of us, looking to the interests of others. In THOSE relationships with others, having the same mindset as Christ. Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God to be used to be his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself, by becoming obedient unto death.

And what exactly did that achieve? The Father exalted him to the highest place, gave him a name that is above every name, that every knee under heaven and earth should bow at his name, and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord.

In chapter 3, it says we serve God by His spirit, that we boast in Jesus Christ, and put NO confidence in the flesh. Paul says he wants to know Christ. To know the power of his resurrection, to participate in his sufferings, and to become like him in his death.... and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection of the dead.

Well, how do we do that?

Paul says we forget what is behind and strain towards what is ahead. Pressing towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus. And

suggests that all who are MATURE should take such a view of these things. That we set not our mind on earthly things, but heavenly things. Once our mind is on those heavenly things, the Lord Jesus Christ, by His power, brings everything under His control, and will transform our lowly bodies, so that they will be like His glorious body.

Chapter 4 is my favorite. I like to begin my Christ centered yoga class with this modified prayer.

Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: REJOICE! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near, do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer, petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul tell us, that when we put these into practice the peace of God will be with us. Then he urges us.... be true, be noble, be right, be lovely, be content in every situation, and be generous.

And he eloquently ends his letter with- The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

I shared these notes at a fellowship meeting and a lovely woman followed along in the King James Version. She noted that the word gentleness had been translated as "moderation." I couldn't help but feel there was a huge difference between gentleness and moderation. So, I looked it up in Hebrew on my Bible Hub app. It was originally "gentleness" that Paul proclaimed should be evident in us all.

Later, in Colossians, Paul had heard of the Believers faith in Jesus Christ and the LOVE they had towards all the Saints. He prayed that they might ALSO be filled with the knowledge of The Lord's will, in all wisdom and understanding. That they may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.

Did you catch that? They were filled with LOVE WHILE they worked on growing in knowledge while actively walking in the path Jesus laid out. They had the love first. Patience and long-suffering means EFFORT to learn patience and action to overcome IMPATIENCE. It means recognizing where your weaknesses are and with ACTION and long-suffering, learning, with His help, how to overcome each of these weaknesses.

So, looking to Christ as my example.... Jesus loves the little children. Well, I was NOT big fan of other people's children. I saw this in myself and I knew that this was a challenge that I needed to conquer. I began to volunteer weekly in BOTH of my younger children's kindergarten and first grade classes. I actively sought out the chance to take conscious steps forward to learn to walk in His path. I had to learn, with

long-suffering, to love those nose picking, booger eating, dirty faced, whiny, and stubborn kids in class that were EXACTLY like MY nose picking, booger eating, dirty face, whiny and stubborn children at home. But somehow, it's easy to love my own children. I had to pray so hard before walking into those classes. I had to pray to see these children the way He sees them. Prayer was my only saving grace. If I forgot to pray, it was awful and my heart raced and I wanted to either discipline them & control them, or bolt as fast as I could and disinfect my entire body. But if I prayed, and asked for strength, it was at LEAST tolerable, albeit, unpleasant. Yet, each week I continued forward in action. Step-by-step, learning how to love these children, walking on the path that Jesus shows us. Matthew chapter 5 tells us that it's easy to love those that love us, but it takes effort to love your enemies, to do good for those which hate you, and to pray for those who persecute you. With our eyes to Christ's example we can overcome our natural man tendencies.

Over the school year, I learned patience and more important I learned to LOVE those children, every one of them. Long-suffering WOULD be the word I would use in this process, but with His strength, I found such a joy in the faces of each of these children as we continued to learn together.

Abinadi said the priests of his day had NOT applied their hearts to understanding the Scriptures. We clearly have the path laid out for us throughout the Bible and in the Book of Mormon. The question is whether it is in our hearts. Are we Christians in name only or in deed? The words in Mosiah contains a lot of beautiful guidance. It is suggested that we "watch" ourselves, and our THOUGHTS, and our WORDS, and our DEEDS and observe the Commandments of God.

This means walking in diligence and circumspectly before God.

"Being mindful" or guarding our thoughts, we can change our negative thoughts and attitudes.

We can give thanks, always, for all things unto God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can learn to PRAISE Him in the storm of life. We can literally rejected jarring and contentions and avoid making the same mistakes as those before us. Not as a whole, but as an individual choice. But it takes effort and practice. It takes recognizing where we have fallen short, asking for forgiveness, and beginning again the next day, or even the next momentnew.

Paul gives us a beautiful scripture to help us guard or watch our words. He says "let no corrupt communication proceed forth out of our mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." I believe our fiery tongue can be a weapon of war that we can CHOOSE to bury for peace. But it takes effort. Lao-Tzu said "Silence is a great source of STRENGTH" This is one I am beginning to work on, I pray I will be strong enough. Paul says let all bitterness, wrath, anger, and evil

speaking be put away from us with all forms of malice. He urges us to be KIND to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.

For me, this idea to “renounce war and proclaim peace” in the D&C takes on a whole new meaning. WE CAN be the ones who PUBLISH peace.

We are required to forgive as Christ forgave. This is an action. It takes thoughtful introspection to look inward to see who has harmed us physically or mentally, who has caused us to harden our hearts against them, who has caused wounds in our spirit with the fiery darts of sharp words or judgments. Meditate on this. Write a list of names of people you need to forgive, even if you're not ready or don't want too yet. And then step-by-step walk in the way of forgiveness. Pray, pray for your heart to become soften to the perceived cruelty or damage to your spirit. Try to see their humanity, look for their good heart, ask for the ability to see them with the eyes of mercy, to see their pain and struggles. Learn to have love and compassion for them by DAILY asking for it. He WILL help us to work through these things, and the tremendous personal growth we experience not only benefits us but those around us because the LOVE will be seen and felt from within us. Then, we can next learn the art of..... not taking offense.

We can learn to walk in the way of love. As Christ also loved us. We can walk as children of light.

I believe that this is what it means to purify ourselves from everything that contaminates the body and the spirit. Perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

We can refine ourselves, we CAN achieve this with conscious awareness. It means to rise above the natural tendencies of self-centeredness, self-seeking, and self-serving. We CAN rise above through self-reflecting, self-realization, and self-scrutiny. We can ask the Father for the help that the SON can liberally offer. We can ALL turn our attention 180° inward and examine ourselves.

The path of mindfulness, conscious awareness, CONCIIOUS living helps us to conquer the battles that each of us have within us that are preventing us from personal growth and evolution and Christlike character development.

I liken this personal character development to just ONE Olive tree in a vineyard. Our tree, my personal tree. I must actively search out with mindful awareness my branches that are weathered and dry, pluck each one, pruning here and there, all the branches the bear no fruit, that have wild or bitter fruit, or even poisonous fruit. I must search my roots, for weaknesses, damages, I must a fertilize my soil and add nutrients. I need to examine each delicate leaf of my persona. I need to be ever aware of the storms on the horizon, so that I may brace for them in preparation, until my weak branches become stronger.

The truth of MY human corruption and natural man is evident upon examination. But with time, ultimately, it is up to ME to create, in my minds eye, the kind of beautiful, strong, healthy tree I actively seek to become. It is my job to bring it into fruition. In Ephesians, Paul beseeches us to walk worthily. In lowliness, meekness, and for bearing one another in love. He says, "let us not walk as other Gentiles walk, in the blindness of our hearts, with our minds darkened. We have been taught by Jesus to put off the former and to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. That we put on the "new man" which is created in righteousness and true holiness."

This IS hard work, changing our lives, aligning our hearts and minds with His to be a true follower of Christ and HIS path. He lays out the way for us, he helps guide us, He has given us such an amazing amount of truth in the scriptures. But what does it mean for us, if we are not willing to follow it in DEED. What do we benefit if we remain in this same corrupted state?

This mighty change is available for EVERYONE to have. There are times that I can barely recognize myself. I am becoming NEW in Christ. I have a LONG way to go and wish I had begun sooner. But I am not special, We can ALL become NEW in Him.

I pray our hearts will unite, that our minds will ever be watchful of our thoughts, words, and deeds. That we would, with diligence, walk in the ways of LOVE and PEACE in Christ Jesus. Amen. Thank you.