

A Better Way

A Biblical Approach to Dating

Introduction Article

Through the years I have enjoyed telling the stories of my many adventures to my children and grandchildren. These stories bring both smiles and laughter to their faces, while allowing me to teach them the great truths of God. Since it is a familiar format to me, I have chosen it for these articles. I hope you will not be bored with my ramblings.

As a Pastor my primary ministry is to the folks in the church I serve. I am not a writer, but a Pastor and this material was put together specifically for the good folks I love and serve. It is largely because of the encouragement of these folks that have found the oral teaching useful that I have written these things down. I hope they will find the written material useful as well. I do love them all dearly. I am especially grateful for Lori my wife, Cathy Connors and Kari Rushmer as they have edited and coached me through the process.

The most significant event in my life was meeting Jesus. Everything that I have done in life since then (whether good or bad) has been done in the grace of that relationship. Indulge me for a moment as I share with you my most significant life changing experience. This also explains the perspective from which I am writing and the invitation available to all who might want to engage life from the same perspective.

The Beginnings

Camp #3 was where I spent my early childhood. My dad worked for El Paso Natural Gas Company. So, we lived in a “company house” in the shadows of a gas plant. To get to our house you exited the main road, crossed a cattle guard, drove by the school bus stop, the plant office, a small park with basketball, tennis, and croquet courts, and on to the one road that looped back into itself. This road was lined on both sides with company houses. Our house was the second from the end. We had neighbors across the street and on both sides of us, but behind the house and all around the plant was nothing but pasture. For a kid with a Daisy BB gun, it was utopia. There was even a pond within walking distance that one could yank an occasional bass or catfish out of. There was a peach tree in the back yard that attracted wasp so big, you could shoot them at fifteen yards with an accurate BB Gun. We had an amazing dog named Socksy. She ran on three legs because of the snake bite that crippled up one of her front legs permanently. When she had puppies, I was entertained for months. It was a quiet tranquil life except for the occasional blunder of ticking off a neighbor because one had picked up the phone and started dialing before listening to see if any one was already talking on the party line. Or worse, they listened before dialing and liked what they heard so they just eavesdropped on the entire conversation. There were also those occasional blasts from the gas plant sirens. Their warning was chilling and frightening as they broke the still night air. Front doors could be heard slamming as men jumped from their beds and into the street with breakneck speed to join the flurry of workers determined to resolve the problem and avoid disaster. Right on the heels of this, moms were throwing children into cars and slinging gravel everywhere as they headed any direction that was away from that plant. Those were tense moments, and once safely away, moments in which mama used to pray for the safety of her man and others. Maybe that was the reason mama always seemed to get jittery at the sound of a siren. There was also that day dad had been hit in the leg by a fin fan, thrown across the engine room and crumpled to the floor. Waiting in the Emergency Room doorway for word about her husband, listening to the coming siren blaring in the distance, might have impacted her also.

Sundays after those experiences were always met with a little more gratitude and a keener understanding of the things in life that really mattered. Cherished friendships that were real, love relationships worth more than gold, a chance to sing and pray with other believers, sharing

conversation over a smoke or jaw full of tobacco on the church steps (for the men only of course) were not to be missed. The preacher might have been a little "hell fire and brimstone" for some, but nobody could have loved us and shown us God's love better than he did. These were the beginnings of the best, sweetest, and most significant events of my life, which all took place in church. My folks were not just attenders; dad led the music and taught Sunday School. Mom raised us on the Bible and had something real going on in her love relationship with God that was contagious. So it was no surprise that when Revival Services came to our little church, we were there. It was just the way things were at our home. One didn't bother to question or protest that a football game might be taking place or that hunting season had just opened. It was understood from years of experience that it would have been to no avail. Therefore, we went. That was alright with me. I enjoyed playing with my friends before and after service, usually swinging on the newly planted trees. This of course was done with an eye out for Deacon Kelly who would reprimand all who threatened those little saplings. I don't remember if I played on the trees this night or not. I think probably not. No, my little mind was in confusion. This wasn't just another "normal" Revival Service. No sir, not for me. I had felt something I had never felt before. I didn't know what it was; but, I reckoned it was God. I was understanding something I had not really taken to heart before. Two simple truths, that God loved me and that my sinfulness was messing that love relationship up. It was a dark night, and I was glad. I sat in that car like a mouse hiding in a corner all the way home. I was able in this darkness to conceal my tears. As we crossed the old cattle guard, I knew my cover of darkness was about to be blown. It was time to stop those tears or others would know I had been crying. I slithered from the car, into the house and then directly to bed unnoticed. I had been successful. However, I didn't sleep well that night. I figured for sure God had spoken to me in that service, but I was not really understanding what He was wanting from me.

Morning came early and so did school. I had forgotten all about the previous night's activities. I settled in for the grueling routine of a strenuous day of Elementary School studies. Before I knew it though, it was evening and time for Revival Services. There was no hesitation on dad's part, no chance that we might just miss one night's Service. No sir, and I knew better than to protest.

Well, as it turned out, this service was no better than the other. In fact, it was worse! Whatever had been churning on my insides the night before did it again with twice the fury. Oh, and the ride home, agony! It was all I could do to keep from bursting into tears so profusely that all would know my internal struggle.

Looking back, that seven-year-old boy certainly didn't feel like the world's greatest sinner. Swinging on those trees behind Otis Kelly's back, may have been my worst crime; that is, if you don't count fighting with your sister. For the first time though, I knew God was calling me to be one of His. To become a Christian. To start a new kind of Love Relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

Well, night three of conviction came as there was still no faltering in dad. Consequently, there we were, dad on the end of the pew, me in the middle with mom and sis on the other side. I reckon that we usually sat that way because I had a way of leaning on the end of the pew when given the chance which was not acceptable; and with me next to dad, he needn't have to move far to thump my head in case I was.....what I considered normal.

Well it happened again. That same feeling, that same pounding and that Preacher just kept on preaching and preaching. It sure seemed to me that, that old Preacher loved Jesus a lot. As I listened, I was feeling that I was in great need of a love relationship with Jesus like that Preacher and my parents had. Then all of a sudden it hit me, that Preacher and maybe God were inviting me to go down during this invitation time, down to the front, in front of everybody. I wasn't sure just what for exactly, but I was confident it would result in my becoming a Christian. I decided I'd go; except, I had two problems. One was the death grip I had on the pew in front of me, the other was this mountain of a man, my dad, blocking my one escape to that aisle that led forward. So, I prayed and told God my dilemma. I suggested that unless dad was moved, this desired response of both He and the Preacher would not be possible tonight. Then I felt myself relax and ease my grip on the pew a little as I stood

there with closed eyes.

Then something awful happened. I heard a noise next to me and opened my eyes to peek. Sure enough, it was happening. Dad stepped out in the aisle and started walking down to the front of the church. Major panic set in and that pounding inside turned to an explosion. How could he do this to me? He just cleared the path and took away my excuse for ignoring my heart at that moment. With all my strength I pulled my hand off the back of that pew. I told myself over and over if daddy could do it so could I. Next thing I knew, I was standing in front of the Preacher. I don't know if I walked, ran or flew down that aisle, but I was there.

The Preacher asked what I'd come for. I told him, "I don't know, I just feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit drawing me to a personal relationship with God through faith in the work and person of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's one and only son." No not really, I was only seven. I said, "God's talking to me." Well that old preacher started asking questions and lucky for me they were all "yes" or "no" answers. He'd ask a question and then ask if I knew what he said. I'd answer yes or no and wait for the expression on his face to reveal whether or not I had gotten the answer right. If he made a funny face, I knew I was wrong, and I'd change it real fast to 'no' or 'yes' respectively. He'd smile and continue. It all went really well, and it ended with me asking Jesus to forgive my sins and come into my life. I basically just said, "Yes" to God's invitation to become His Child. Know what? That internal problem I was having disappeared. Jesus came into my life that night, no doubt about it, and He has never left. That's the best I can describe it. Sitting here thinking about it all again stirs up a flood of emotion. I'm so glad I'm His; the walk has proven Him a worthy savior. His word is surely true, "...whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13) September 19, 1965 my life was changed, my course was set in a different direction and my future secured. My view of the world changed, and I now view everything through the eyes of faith.

It is for the perspective of that moment and the change it brought into my life that this material is written.

I do not know if you have had a moment like mine where you realized that God loves you and wants a relationship with you. It is only in that relationship that He can give you abundant and eternal life. It is sin that keeps us from all His love wants to give us. Even as a seven-year-old boy, I knew myself to be a sinner and in need of grace. My upbringing had introduced me to Jesus as God's provision for my sin. So, it was relatively easy for me to say "yes" to Jesus and "yes" to God. I hope you have said "yes" to His invitation as well. I hope you don't put it off as I did for several days but rather say "yes" to God's invitation the moment you hear His call. That is my story. What is your story? What is the most significant life changing moment you have experienced? The things that make you who you are, will be very important for you to understand as we make this seven-week journey together. Also know if you are reading this, I have prayed for you that what you read here will be useful in your life according to God's purposes for you.