

I was raised in a very dysfunctional Southern Baptist family. My Father had been in seminary when he and my mother met. His parents took away his money for college when my parents decided to marry so my dad never finished seminary but had to begin working to support his new family. I was born the fourth of five children while we were living in the LA area. Shortly after my birth we moved to Utah. I remember how we were sort of outcast, not being Mormon in this predominantly Mormon society. We had friends in church but, being mostly military families, they were always coming and going so there was not a lot of stability. My father was working as a truck driver and was gone for several days at a time, which my mother handled by turning to prescription drugs to cope with the loneliness. After 16 years together my parents divorced. My older sister and I moved with our mother to Memphis, TN with another truck driver my mom had met. What a culture shock for an 8-year-old white boy from Utah!

We had found another church my mom liked and would go most every Sunday. I had been baptized when I was 7 at an 'altar call' and had never minded going to church. I think that was mostly because that's what we had always done so it was more just a normal part of life than a necessity. I had very few friends and felt very alone most of the time. By the time I was a teenager my mother second marriage was falling apart and I was looking for anyway to escape from my world. So like many in my position I found solace in alcohol and drugs. I would use any drug that was offered and drink anything I could get my hands on. I began staying away from home for days at a time and dropped out of high school during my second attempt at the 10th grade. After this my mom gave me an ultimatum; either go back to school or get a job. So I joined the US Navy when I was 17, yet another shock to a teenager who thought he knew it all!

I soon discovered that it was really easy to get alcohol when you're in the military and almost as easy to get drugs. While stationed in San Diego I got 2 DUI's and was forced to go through counseling for alcoholism and to attend AA meetings. By the age of eighteen I had become a full-blown drunk. It was normal for me to drink a liter of whiskey in one night about two or three times a week not to mention all the beer I drank the rest of the time. I could hardly eat, nothing would stay down and I don't know how much weight I lost. I was wasting away. So I went to the AA meetings with half hearted intentions of cleaning up. I made some friends but being the youngest person at the meetings was a bit odd at times. I began to look forward to the meetings and the sense of belonging to something. I had never really felt that before. It was a good feeling but frightening at the same time.

A few months later I agreed to go on a weekend retreat in the mountains east of San Diego. It was with a group closer to my age. The retreat was one of these New Age type of things where you can get 'in touch' with your inner self and heal your sufferings or something like that. It turned out to be a defining moment in my life. We were at a lodge type building far up in the mountains. It was very beautiful and serene. The first night we were all gathered in this large common room that had a big fireplace on one side and high vaulted ceilings. Everyone was taking turns talking about his or her feelings and problems. I didn't have much to say. I wasn't ready to bare my problems to this group of strangers. There was a lot of emotion in the room, people crying and people trying to comfort those who were crying. I really felt out of place, I didn't like people touching me or getting close to me. I was hurting terribly inside but I wouldn't let it show. I had to be

tough. After about an hour or so of this we split up for some quiet time to reflect on what we were feeling. Some of us, my self included, went outside so we could smoke. It was a clear dark night with no moon and stars just as far as you could see. I had always had (and still do) an attraction for the night sky. If you've ever been out in the country on such a night you know what I mean.

I found a place to myself, up a small hill and sat down on a rock outcropping. I had so many emotions and thoughts running through my head of all these years of loneliness and despair. I began to sob uncontrollably. I did something I had never done, I cried out to God. I blamed Him and I yelled at Him. I had 'believed' in Him like I had been taught and He had forsaken me! I looked up to the sky and I asked God if He was still there for me to let me know somehow. At that moment, through my teary vision, I saw a star shoot across the sky and faded out. I knew in an instant that He had heard me and somehow after all I had done He was still there for me. I didn't feel so alone anymore. I don't remember much else about that weekend but I will never forget that shooting star.

Over the next few months my life improved, I stopped drinking and tried to deal with the problems that had been haunting me all my life. I was discharged from the Navy because of my problems. I eventually moved back home and it wasn't long before I was back into my old ways. So I moved again, vowing to start over and really get my life straightened out. I was troubled by the memory of a sermon the pastor at our Baptist church had preached when I was a teenager. It was the story of a young man, probably in his twenties, who had ignored God's call all of his life. He died in a car accident without ever having turned his life over to Jesus. So he had ended up in Hell for his procrastination. This troubled me for a long time. I was afraid I would die because God had given up on me and there was no hope left in me. Although I had tried to kill myself in many ways, I never really wanted to die. I just didn't want to hurt anymore.

The next 10 years were a vicious roller coaster ride, drinking binges followed by hollow promises to never do it again. I got married, I became a father and again vowed to change my ways. I was a terrible father and an even worse husband. Promise after meaningless promise broken. I was my own enemy; slowly destroying what good remained of my very soul.

Fast forward to 2005:

I sat in the back of the Basilica of The Sacred Heart at Notre Dame University with tears running down my cheeks. It was late November and I had come to the campus to buy some presents for the upcoming Christmas holiday. For the last six months I had been dealing with the death of my brother David. I would find myself suddenly crying as I drove down the road because something had brought back a memory of him. I had a lot of guilty feelings for not having spent enough time with him and not being there when he did die. I don't think it was a coincidence that I was passing the cathedral just before mass was to start. I hadn't been going to mass very often and I don't remember much about this particular mass. I was hurting so much inside, overcome with guilt and grief. I began to pray to God to help me to ease my pain and let me know David was okay. As I sat there crying I felt God reach down and touch me. A peace like I had never felt before permeated me and a calm swept through my body. The tears still fell but not from

sadness or pity, I felt comforted. That night I wept on God's shoulder. That night was the beginning of my journey into full communion with God and his Church.

I had joined the Catholic Church about seven years earlier. My wife was a semi-practicing cradle Catholic and had wanted to be married in the church and for our son to be raised catholic. So I joined the Church under the pretense that it was just 'a church' and that my belief in Jesus was all that really mattered. I gained a decent intellectual knowledge of the church's teaching from the RCIA program we went through but I never really had a spiritual grasp of those concepts that seemed so alien to my Southern Baptist upbringing.

When I left the campus I made a commitment to get back closer to God. I had a satellite radio so I started listening to the Christian station. I thought I just needed to get back to what I had been raised with and I would be okay. Over the next couple of months I became very confused, I would hear one pastor say something and the next one I heard would say something completely different. I also would hear thinly disguised jabs at the Catholic Church; things I knew were a distortion of what the Church really teaches or even flat out lies about the Church. I found that I suddenly had a different view of the Catholic Church, that maybe it was more than just another denomination.

After a couple of months of this I had what I call a 'spiritual migraine'. I asked God for some guidance and clarity in all of this confusion. For the first time I can remember I really wanted to find THE Truth. I found out there was another satellite service that carried EWTN Catholic radio so I switched service. I began to listen to EWTN constantly and was so moved by what I heard. The reasoning and logic of the church's teaching all right there in scripture. Things I had been told before but never really heard.

One night I heard the rosary being prayed by Fr Benedict Groeschel, I had never really prayed the rosary except once at a funeral. I had heard a lot of people talk about the power of praying the rosary but didn't really know much about it. So I began to pray the rosary every night along with the radio and asking God and our Blessed Mother for an increase in my faith and clearer understanding of the scriptures. The results were incredible; I started seeing things so differently I began to understand things I didn't before. Everyday now is a new discovery of the wealth of knowledge of our faith that the Catholic Church has been entrusted with for over two thousand years. I understand what the Deposit of Faith is and how valuable it truly is to those of us so blessed to a part of Christ's Church.

As I look back now I can see clearly many times how God was leading me (many times kicking and screaming) to this point my whole life. It is easy to have regret for what would seem a lot of wasted time but no time is wasted if we finally find ourselves at the feet of Jesus. Right where God wants us all.

By the grace of God I no longer battle with drugs or alcohol. I still have struggles with my past and life is not always great but now I know whom to turn to when life seems too hard. I guess you could say I'm finally 'born again'.

I have recently been reading St. Augustine's *Confessions* and at times can see so many parallels between my life and his. Even after hundred of centuries we are all still

basically the same, searching for that happiness that can only be found through the eternal Word of God, eternal life with our savior Jesus Christ.

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