

Janet's Testimony:

I've been asked to share my testimony. Some of my Facebook family will understand, some will roll their eyes, some might even block me. It's a risk I'll take. Here goes....

When I think of what having God in my life means to me, it starts with how He healed my heart. I reflect on the emptiness of growing up without a father. My earliest memories are those of violence, my mom carting us away to safe locations, my father beating her and sometimes me, and of the police arriving at my home. My dad wasn't a monster, but he did battle alcohol abuse and personal frustrations that made him act like one, and his problems caused great turmoil in my family. Unfortunately, positive memories of my father are few. He was out of my daily life before I was six. My childhood was in other ways wonderful because I had an awesome mother that took care of almost every need and was a fantastic role model and friend. But, still, my formative years were without a father or other consistent, supportive, kind male figure in my life, and it scarred me. I had low self-esteem. I had trust issues. I felt abandoned. I felt unworthy of love. Most of my family was raised in the Catholic Church. I enjoyed the pageantry, the beautiful buildings, and learning the stories from the bible, but it never felt like a relationship with God, more like a spectator at a weekly event. When I was about 16, I met Jeanine, who became my high-school best friend. Jeanine and I both loved to sing. Jeanine was a middle-kid in a family of Baptists, a wonderful, warm family that pulled me into their home and their church. At first, I was there for the friendship, but through them, I learned a lot about the love of Christ. God used that Baptist pastor and Campus Crusade for Christ to reach me. I was saved and baptized when I was 17. (Through us, Jeanine's mom and mine became great friends. My mom was saved shortly after.) From then on, I belonged to God. I've always been most at home in the wild places, especially forests and mountains. Just take a look around at this beautiful natural world and the stars in the sky! It is so apparent to me that God is the source and creator of all of this, and that it's no accident or random incarnation.

Not long after, I was a college student far from home, and I charted my own course, sliding backward from my walk with Jesus. He became less important in my day-to-day existence. College was fun and a bit wild and I was a science major, which presented some contradictions to my spiritual mind. After graduation, I married a man that I'd met at school and in a few years we had two daughters. He didn't believe in God. Life was pretty good, except that the perspective of a Christian is much different than an agnostic or atheist husband. It began to matter most once we had children. I'd

bundle my girls up and head to Redding First Baptist Church, but this caused tension between us. Over the years, we both made prideful mistakes that brought the marriage to an end. My marriage followed the pattern of my parents; alcohol abuse followed by violence. The night after he choked me in front of my littlest girl, I asked God to please help me. Although I'd been only partially attentive to God over my adult life, He never left me. He came to my rescue by opening doors for our escape, and the girls and I moved into Redding. He guided me to a safe home and a job. Single parenthood was tough. My mom (my itty-bitty, God-fearing powerhouse of a mom) stepped in to help when I had to work extra hours. We were getting by. My girls were young. In some ways, through the family struggles the girls grew stronger and more compassionate, but they were also scarred by the anger they'd witnessed and the absence of their father. As for me, I was exhausted and lonesome. My experiences seemed to confirm the evidence of God working in my life, but I didn't fully understand judgement or salvation, and I alternately denied or ignored the existence of Hell.

I was on my roof one day, cleaning leaves out of the gutters, when I started a head-first slide toward the edge of the roof and a long drop down. Recovering my balance, I said a tearful, heartfelt prayer begging God to rescue me from my loneliness and the pressures in my life. About a week later, Jim entered my life. God sent me this man with the warmth and kindness that I'd been missing. One of the things I appreciate most about Jim is that we encourage and challenge each other as we strive to know God's heart. My life is so different now. It's mostly wonderful, and I know that I am blessed.

Over the years, God has taken away my emptiness, rescued me from violence, provided me with what I needed to persevere through tough times, guided me in raising my children, sent me protectors and support when I needed these most, and greatest of all, He has washed away all of my mistakes and transgressions so that eternity for me is secure. I no longer deny that there are dark forces in the world. I believe that we have a choice: at the end of our lives we face judgement and an accounting for our lifetime. What comes next is eternity in Heaven filled with all the goodness and beauty that God provides OR to a Hell completely, forever absent of the goodness of God. Spiritually, I've grown immensely in the past five years. I never want to be separated from God. I am so thankful that I'm now part of a church family that I love, and for a pastor preaching the Word of God with a warrior's heart (no easy, sugar-coated faith here!). I love being in the company of those that seek God, and my heart breaks for those that

don't. I want to share Christ, and all that He has done for me, with family and others who do not know Him.

Jesus' actions in life show me that loving and obeying God, the Father, is paramount in life, and that everything good flows from God.

In meeting a horrible death for the sins of all of us, Jesus showed me how to forgive people that have abandoned or wronged me. I was finally able to understand that my father's upbringing on the reservation, which was surely hard and quite possibly terrible, was a key to his behavior, and I forgave him. I have learned not to be angry at my first husband, and to treat him with kindness.

I have seen that God's love NEVER fails and I take great comfort in knowing His promises for eternity for those that obey Him. (I'm a hard-headed woman and I still struggle with obedience, but now I actually desire to be obedient.) The Word of God gains strength daily in me, and there is NO void in me now where a father was supposed to be. I am complete, I am whole, I am loved, I am redeemed from sin, I am a daughter of the King, and I am the wife of a godly man. I want to live the rest of my days repaying my debt to Jesus for his mercy, kindness, and care, and in obeying and glorifying the Father.

For those that think God is a myth, you're in the minority. People in many world cultures seek peace and eternity through their beliefs, but let it be known that Jesus is the only way to reconcile with God. For each that thinks they're basically a good enough person already—you're wrong, we all are tainted by sin—we're selfish, greedy, vain, and sometimes cruel. For anyone reading this that experiences loneliness, despair, feels that life is less than it should be, or is trapped in addiction or violence, reach out to Jesus. Just talk to Him. He knows your pain and He can absolutely change your life and your future. God loves us dearly and wants every one of us to enter the kingdom of Heaven. I can honestly say that I have experienced the love of God and I encourage you to put aside your doubts and pride and take that step to reach out to Him!