

Cindy - *He changed me and I am so thankful!*

I was always a Christian; I have never known anything else. Just a few days after my birth, my Christian up-bringing began. Faithfully, my parents took my siblings and me to church each week. We went to Sunday school and Youth group and all the traditions of my Presbyterian heritage were taught to me with careful consideration and pride. It was what we knew. "God was good and He loved me and I loved Him back," that was good enough for me. I was pretty good at following all of the rules and I was a person with many natural skills and abilities that I used to do lots of churchy activities. I played hand bells and did lots of good deeds in my church and at school. I had always been very thoughtful in the things that I chose to do in and out of church and was for all general purposes a "good person". I had no great testimony to tell and I could never really tell you the day that Jesus came into my life, but I knew He was real and He spoke to me quite often. I can tell you now of many times that God was with me, speaking and working, but at the time I am not even sure that I knew it was God. The time came for me to choose a college and without much thought or prayer, I chose Grove City College. It was my only choice. It had all of the qualities I was looking for. It was close to home, had good moral values and educational standards and it was cheap. I was Presbyterian and GCC was affiliated with the Presbyterian Church and so it just made sense. I had no idea that choosing GCC would be the biggest decision of my life

When I arrived at GCC, I was unaware at first that I was lacking anything. But early in my freshman year I began to realize that there were students there who seemed to really know God. They were worshippers and prayer warriors. I liked to sing and I believed that prayer was probably good, but I was definitely not a worshipper or a prayer warrior. Of course, I knew every hymn by heart, but these new songs they were singing were like camp songs or something. They were raising their hands and practically dancing around. I have to say that I wasn't quite sure what it was all about, but it was fun to sing and so I sang. Then they would get into these little prayer circles to pray. There was no way I was sitting in one of those circles. No way! They were praying. Praying was the job of ministers and Sunday school teachers; I was not prepared to actually do it myself, at least not out loud that was for sure! So week after week I would leave the service they called, "Warriors for Christ" after the "singing" and sneak out the back door. God was working; I just had no idea how yet.

I soon met a Godly young man who swept me off my feet. Actually the truth is I chased him until he finally quit running, but the bottom line is we ended up in a serious relationship and I started to see how other families practiced their faith. His family did things a lot different than I had ever witnessed by anyone in my life growing up. They seemed to really know God. I would say that Lance's mom seemed to have DSL and I had dial-up with a busy signal. Her prayers were always being answered and she talked about God as if He were as real and relevant as you or I. It was a curious thing, but also a world away. Lance's family was from Orlando and we all know everything is bigger, brighter and much more theatrical in Orlando. After many visits to their Mega-church, I was trying to convince myself that it was just a style thing. Lance and I were married and year after year we would visit their church and I would be blown away, but then we'd get back in the car and head back to good old PA and our down home kind of living. Church was just church, not all the theatrics and glitz. I wanted to believe with all my heart that it was just a style thing, but something in me was stirred every time I would go there. Lance and I were growing in our marriage and I had come a long way in my prayer life and my walk, but it still all made no sense to me in practical ways. I was still basically a good person who knew God was good and that He loved me and I loved Him and that was still good enough for me. Too many things happened for me to tell it all, but my mother-in-law just kept pointing me to Jesus. She would tell me, "Cindy that is His voice you are hearing". She continually pointed me to Jesus and was so patient with me and all of my flesh driven behaviors.

Let's just say that I was definitely a Christian, but there was not much fruit and not much spirit. In my natural state, I am impatient, easily stressed and bossy. I am not very flexible and I

like to be in charge. I not only like to be the boss of me, but I like to be the boss of you, too. God gave me a lot of natural abilities and I felt like I was supposed to use them, of course for good, but in any way I saw fit. My mouth would constantly get me in trouble. I was a "straight shooter." I just told it like it was. Nothing wrong with that, except for all of the feelings that I hurt along the path, which was wherever I wanted to go.

God was working though, and just a few weeks after Libby was born in 2000, I heard of a Bible study that was starting at my church. It was a women's study and they were doing Experiencing God by Blackaby. I cannot tell you why, but there was the strongest force pushing me to that study. I just knew that I had to be there. I remember taking my brand new baby with me and walking into the room. I am sure that I did not even have a Bible, at least not one that I knew where it was, but I was so drawn to that study. I just knew I was there for a purpose. I thought the reason was to find good Christian lady friends. I did not have a strong Christian circle of friends and I was desperately looking for support in raising these three little ones all under 4 years old. I looked around the room and quickly surveyed the possible friends, no one really looked that appealing to me to be honest, but I knew I was meant to be there. Each person was to introduce themselves and tell why they had come to the study. When it was my turn, I remember saying, "I don't care what we learn about God, I am here to meet the people." Probably not the most spiritual thing to say, but it was my truth.

As soon as we began, I dove right into the study. It opened my eyes to so many things I had never even heard of before. Who was this Holy Spirit? The only time He was mentioned in my upbringing was when we would recite the Apostles' Creed. We would say, "I believe in the Holy Ghost". Frankly, that was a little scary to me, but in truth He was never talked about besides that so I didn't worry much about it. What in the world was all this submitting and seeing Him work stuff? Where was this all going? Within 4 weeks, I found myself in the car with my Mother-in- love for a long journey. Dad, Lance and all three kids were in the back of the van and Mom and I talked in the front. Finally, after nine years of being under her mentorship and care, I asked her why she seemed to know God and I just knew about Him, why her prayers were so real, why she talked to Him all of the time and why I felt like I wasn't even sure if God was really there at all. What was the key?

She told me about her own transformation 30 years earlier and told me about what it means to be filled with the Spirit and baptized in the Holy Spirit. I had known that some "strange" things had happened once in a while when I would visit their church in Orlando, but like I said I chocked it up to the whole Orlando/ Disney world thing. It was fantasy, right? But this time I knew it was real, I knew that this was what God was drawing me to and I knew it was time. I could no longer be the boss of me. I could no longer just keep trying to do better, I could no longer go on just going through the motions, and I needed what she had. I needed to be filled, I needed His power, I needed to lay down my whole self and give full control over to His Spirit. And for this vessel, my tongue was definitely the rudder. I knew that God was telling me that if He was ever going to be able to steer this ship in His direction, that I had to give Him full authority over my mouth. I was already saved and His Spirit was in me, but I had never given Him the authority to rule. I had never made Him Lord of all of me; my body, soul, flesh, mind, will or mouth. It was time to lay it at His feet and let Him fill me to overflowing with His Spirit and power.

That evening, all alone in my shower, which as you know is one of the only places a young mother gets to be alone, I did it. I laid it down and I asked my Savior, Jesus Christ, to not just save me from eternal damnation but to clean me, fill me up and baptize me in his Holy Spirit. In faith, just as Peter did when he stepped out of the boat and onto the water, I, in faith, opened my mouth and for the first time spoke a new language unknown to me, but every bit as real as the words I am typing across this page. In that moment it was as if the scales fell from my eyes and all the things that had never made sense to me when I would read my Bible were

suddenly real. They weren't just stories, they were real. It wasn't some scary, weird thing that those "Pentecostals" did, but it was real and it was powerful and refreshing. God started a work years before in my life, but on this day it was as if the flood gate had opened, the Spirit poured through me and as if the hot coal had come to my lips, my mouth was clean and it was His. It was April 10, 2000. My life would never be the same. Now what was I supposed to do?

Let's just say the ladies at my Bible study were not so thrilled to hear about what had happened. I know they saw a difference in me, in fact, I practically glowed, but they were not so enthusiastic. I had become one of "those people" now. One of those "Pentecostals". It was almost as if it were a dirty word. Sure they all knew it was Biblical, but was it really real? Was it all just emotionalism? Was it just a show? Was it really for everyone? What was I supposed to do now? I decided the only thing I could do was study. I needed to know everything there was to know about this "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" and I needed to know it now. I never was a big reader, but suddenly I could not stop. It was as if I had been starving and now my spirit was being fed. It was as if my soul was in a major overhaul and the transformation was taking place at the same rate as my landscaping took shape when a team of 20 laid out my whole yard in two hours trees and all. It was as if my eyes were open to the little things in my house that had to go; the TV shows that were no longer ok and the words that I had always used that were no longer acceptable. My life was being transformed, at every level and in every category. God was now working at warp speed and there was no hiding it.

In an act of mercy, Lance was given an assignment to go to LA for 6 months. It was an opportunity of a lifetime and it was my chance to leave all the craziness of my real life and get alone with God and my family. We arrived in LA on July 15, 2000 and through a course of miracles lived in a \$550,000 home in Glendale, CA courtesy of GE. We were immediately drawn into a wonderful church and spent the next 6 months studying and visiting all kinds of wonderful churches during the week. I often went to the Church on the Way to worship and sit under the teaching of Jack Hayford. During those 6 months my mom was diagnosed with Stage 3 C Ovarian cancer and was battling for her life and yet it was the most glorious awakening for my whole family. In fact, my parents were close to divorcing and my dad had lost his way years before. Yet during this time, God brought my family to a new place of understanding and fellowship with Him. God was working and He was revealing Himself to us in ways we had never known. One night, my parents, desperate for a touch from God went to a town 20 miles away from their home to a little Pentecostal church that met in an old Theater in a run down steel town. When they walked in the door, the presence of God was so overwhelming that my mom was blown away. She had never in her whole life experienced His presence like that, but my dad felt as if he were home again. You see, we never knew, but my dad had grown up in a Spirit filled church and when he left home he left those things behind him and joined my mom's church where her family had attended for generations. God was doing a new thing in our family and He was revealing Himself to us in miraculous ways.

After 6 months we returned to Grove City, refreshed and ready to serve, but our home church was not any more enthusiastic about the transformation God had done in my life now then they were when we left. We stayed for about another two years, but then we knew it was time to go. God was calling us somewhere else. It was as if we were being drawn to a new place where He was working. We would get into our car week after week and have no idea where we were going to end up for church, but each week we faithfully loaded the kids in the car and God would tell us where to go. Finally, my good friend Rhonda Brooks, who had known me way back at that first Bible Study at my old church, handed me a paper with the 12 Strategic Areas of Vision for the Grove City Alliance Church on it. We read it and knew that God was calling us to this church. God had given me such a heart for worship and prayer and had called me to bring the children to his feet so that He could teach them His ways. We knew immediately that we were being prayed into this church and that we were finally home. It was the spring of 2003, my

mother had been miraculously healed of her cancer and we were ready to get back to the Lord's work and to be fed "meat" each week from the word of God.

To me, it doesn't matter what the name on the door is, it just matters if the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are welcome. In this place we have found our home. Pastor Dick and Marilyn are servants of our Heavenly Father and they have taught us so much. We each have to decide every day if we are going to follow our flesh or follow the Lord. If we are going to be boss or let Him lead. If we are going to seek the deeper things or if we are going to settle with a ticket to heaven but a powerless life here on earth. God is moving at Grove City Alliance church and I am so thankful that He has allowed us the pleasure of serving Him here. When you see me worship or hear me pray, when you witness me leading the kids in praise to our Lord or when we sit in a Bible study together, know that in my own strength I am weak, impatient, bossy and easily stressed, but in Him I have become more than a conqueror. I can honestly say that I am now a worshipper and a prayer warrior. I am a teacher and a mentor and it is all by His grace alone and for His glory only! Praise be to God.