

Leigh

I had originally come to know the Lord when I was 18 years old. I had grown up in the church, but I never knew what it really meant to have a personal relationship with God until I moved back to my hometown, Grove City, PA, in the summer of 1998. I had not lived in Grove City for about ten years, and I was ready to start my senior year in high school at a new place. This was scary; I was not sure how I was going to make friends in such a short period of time.

I attended Catholic Mass at the time, and a girl that I recognized from second grade approached me in church. She remembered me and asked me if I would be interested in going to a Bible study with her. I was very interested, so I went with her every Tuesday night to study Scripture. She introduced me to all of her friends there, and they introduced me to more people. Pretty soon, I was surrounded by Christian people every day. When you are repeatedly around people that love the Lord, you cannot help but wonder what the big deal is. I finally got curious and started reading the Bible on my own. I can remember the presence of the Lord filling me as I read about the works of Jesus and how much He loves us. I kept reading my Bible as I went through my senior year. It was not until I read the book Power for Living during my freshman year of college that I accepted Jesus as my Savior. The prayer of salvation was in the first few pages of the book, and I prayed that prayer and asked Jesus if He would be Lord of my life.

A few years passed, and I had forgotten about praying that prayer. I was attending a very liberal college, and I took on the liberals' beliefs and world-view. If I believe in Jesus, but someone else wants to believe in Buddha that was okay with me. If I did not want to smoke, but someone else wanted to smoke pot that was okay for me. My morals pretty much went down the toilet because I stopped reading my Bible, and I believed that morals were relative to the person. Relative truth was the truth and everyone else believed that, so why not me? I carried on like this for about three years. Then something happened to me that changed my life forever.

My twin sister was moving away. She graduated from college in 2003 and was planning on attending a different school the following fall. She packed up her things and left in June. Being without my twin sister for the first time was tough. I cried for one day, and then I was fine. I went back to work the next day as if nothing had ever happened. Or so I thought.

A month later in July, it hit me. I became depressed. I was sad all of the time, and I had negative thoughts constantly. I felt pain in my lower abdomen almost every day, and I felt like my heart had dropped into my stomach, literally. I thought I was going crazy. I was so down that I did not care about my appearance. It was hard work to smile, but I made myself do it anyway. I never thought about suicide, but I did not care if someone ran me over with their car or shot me with a pistol.

You see, I had depended on my twin sister for everything. I usually was not happy unless I was with her. She was the one who was more social and more outgoing, and whenever we went out with friends, I was just along for the ride. She made all the social arrangements. So when I was trying to make it without her, I was uncomfortable with calling people because I had never done it very much. Consequently, I lived like a hermit most of the time that summer. All I did was busy myself with work. I did not call or get in touch with people because I did not know how, figuratively speaking. I was hurting without her and did not even realize it, because I did not speak to anyone about it. As a result, I became depressed.

Then I decided to switch churches in September of 2003. Because I was so down, I needed something more spiritual. When I attended Grove City Alliance Church for the first time that September, I never wanted to leave. It felt like home. The people were so welcoming, and Pastor Dick spoke the truth; I had not been around that kind of talk in three years. I needed that. So I kept going. I started praying to the Lord and reading my Bible again. I prayed to Him every day that I would stop hurting and be healed. I got no response from Him, but I just kept praying and praying. I persevered. I did not give up.

In December, I finally decided to start taking medication. I was convinced earlier in the year that I did not need medication and that the Lord would heal me in His own time. But I was

not feeling any better by the end of the year, and I was desperate. I was feeling so down and I still felt the impulse to cry almost every day. When the new semester started in January, I had my first appointment with a nurse practitioner to receive medication on my school campus.

She observed and evaluated me, and she diagnosed me with mild to moderate depression. She said that my case was unusually light. The fact that I had no trouble sleeping was rare and that my appetite was not affected very much was even stranger. Most college students that are evaluated for depression hardly eat anything at all and have a hard time sleeping the entire night. Another thing she mentioned that struck me as unique was that I was very articulate for a depressed person. She said a lot of college students that come in to see her have a hard time speaking in full sentences. Wow. I was experiencing mild depression? I did not even want to know what it felt like to be severely depressed!

She had also asked me how I was spending my time. I told her that I prayed a lot and I had joined choir at church. I also mentioned to her that I was going to start attending a Bible study that week. She said that those things were good and that I should have healthy distractions while I start this medicine and continue to heal.

I had joined choir the night before this appointment. I had fun at my first practice, and everyone was so warm and friendly. I met a guy about my age that was also in the choir, and he invited me to this Bible study that I spoke of to the nurse practitioner. I felt like my heart was going to melt. This guy did not know me well at all, and he invited me to a Bible study. He made me feel like I mattered, and he made me feel included when I had felt so alone.

I started the medicine on Tuesday night, the night after choir practice at church. It was an absolute nightmare. I had a panic attack the first night I was on this medicine. The high anxiety continued throughout the day and the next night, too. And the next day and night, and the next day and night. So by the time Friday night came, the night of the Bible study, I was anxious and tired. I had not slept well in days. I did not think I was going to last very long on this medicine. I was so miserable, and I did not think the Lord was answering my calls for help.

When I went to the Bible study, not only was I experiencing high anxiety to begin with, but I was anxious about talking to new people, too. I was pretty uncomfortable the entire night. I did enjoy singing, praising God, and listening to others talk throughout the study. When the time came to offer prayer requests, I decided not to be shy. I admitted to everyone that I was depressed and that the past week had been miserable. I had not slept much at all. I confessed that if the Lord would let me sleep six hours, I would be happy.

One woman prayed for me before I left that night, and I went to bed anxious as usual. It was 1:00 a.m. I closed my eyes, hoping and praying that I would sleep. I opened my eyes a little while later and checked the clock. It read 7:00 a.m.! I slept for the first time in three days! As I just lay there in astonishment, I felt my stomach muscles starting to tense up in anxiety, but something pushed my stomach muscles back out again. I felt a warm, radiating energy in my lower abdomen that I had never felt before. It was powerful and intense, yet it made me feel relaxed, calm, and at peace. I started to cry, and I thanked the Lord for giving me the six hours of sleep that I requested. I also thanked Him for His Holy Spirit that was dwelling within me that morning, the Presence that was defeating my anxiety that had prevented me from sleeping all week.

I went back in for my follow-up appointment with the nurse practitioner a few weeks later. She said she had never seen such recovery before. She said in a matter of weeks I had become a new person. As she listened to me, she reflected back on the fact that I prayed a lot and that I was involved with my church and started attending a Bible study. She said, "I really do believe that you need a personal relationship with God in order to heal." I replied, "Yes, not many people on this campus would want to hear that, but it is the truth."

It is the truth. I believe that with my full heart and soul now. Depression was one of the worst things that I ever had to go through, but God used it to bring me closer to Him again. I

also think He used it to further my commitment to serving Him. When I was first saved, I basked in His Presence, but I never really considered how He could use me to further His Kingdom. Ever since I was depressed and started attending GCAC, I started becoming serious about serving Him, and how I could use my gifts to glorify Him. There is no relative truth anymore. There is absolute truth as ordained by God the Father and of our Lord Jesus Christ who died for our sins.

Now, I have never felt better in my life. The guy that invited me to the Bible study became my husband nearly two years later. Ever since he had invited me that time, he introduced me to his friends and I surrounded myself with a group of Christians again. I became less and less anxious about starting conversations with people. In fact, my husband playfully teases me that we are always the last to leave church because I am still talking to people. I love my church family, and I have so many friends--friends I never thought I would have without my twin sister. I am a teacher for the Sign Language Ministry Team at GCAC, and also, through the church, my husband and I host a young adult Bible study on Tuesday nights (the same night of the first Bible study I ever attended). The Lord works in mysterious ways.

The Lord is good, and I praise Him for healing me and for doing all He has done in my life. I am still taking my medication. I have come to realize that it may be the Lord's will to heal people through medicine, so it should never be ruled out. And it may not have seemed like it then, but the Lord was with me all throughout those horrible months of depression. He made me realize that I needed Him. I also think that my case was a witness to the nurse practitioner. The fact that I was sleeping well during the previous semester, for example, was rare to her, and it probably made her really think that something else was going on: something supernatural.

Living for the Lord is a supernatural experience. I love the Lord and He is first in my life. I don't just want my story to be a witness to the nurse; I want my story to encourage other believers who may be going through a similar struggle or those that just need encouragement that the Lord does touch His people. If the Lord can heal me, He can heal others, too. We just have to trust and have faith in Him.

"So, God accepted Abraham's faith, and that faith made him right with God.' Those words were written not only for Abraham, but also for us. God will accept us also because we believe in the One who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead."--Romans 4:22-24 (NCV)