



CONTAGIOUS FAITH

Stories of
Transformation
from Members of
Our Savior
Lutheran Church

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; His greatness no one can fathom.
One generation will commend your works to another;
they will tell of your mighty acts.

PSALM 145:3-4

CONTAGIOUS FAITH



Our Savior

LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL

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THE FOLLOWING PERSONAL FAITH STORIES WERE WRITTEN BY MEMBERS and friends of Our Savior Lutheran Church, Excelsior, Minnesota. These stories are real. God is mercifully at work in each of our lives if we will only open our eyes of faith to see His handiwork. Our prayer is that each story in this booklet will encourage and bless you. Maybe some of these stories will relate to your story, allowing you to see the grace of God a little more clearly and bringing you into a closer relationship with Him. So, jump right in and enjoy!

Table of Contents



JUDY WINTERS	1
ERIC TAGGATZ	3
ALICIA KUHLMANN	5
SUE GUENTHER	7
DEB NIEBUHR	10
MARLENE DOHENY	13
DONNA RHODES	16
RAY FRIGARD	18
ANONYMOUS	20
JERRY ROSAMOND	22
ANONYMOUS	25
LINDA NIEMEYER	27
BETH PURSLEY	30

**For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—
the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses
all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

ROMANS 10: 12-13



I GREW UP GOING TO CHURCH BUT NEVER REALLY FELT THE PRESENCE of Jesus Christ in my life. I raised my two children as a single parent, making sure they too had Jesus in their lives.

In October of 1999 my aunt, by marriage, was in a horrible car accident and was hospitalized in the metro area. Being one of the only family members in town, I received one of the first phone calls asking if I could be at the hospital when the air ambulance arrived. I arrived at the hospital about 30 minutes after she did. Being from a small rural town in southwest Minnesota, it took her husband hours to drive here. So my aunt and I bonded like a mother to a child. She was in the ICU at North Memorial and, of course, only family was allowed in. So my uncle and I became her only contacts. It was days of watching and waiting for signs of movement under her own power as she had a head injury with spinal cord damage. That movement never came; she was to live her life as a quadriplegic.

Hours after her husband arrived, I took a break from the ICU and found myself in the chapel. It was at that time that I truly accepted Jesus into my life. I knew that if I was to get through this situation I would need to pull strength from somewhere and I felt the presence of my God and Savior. I talked to God in

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

my hour of need and returned to the ICU with unbelievable strength and insight as to what needed to be done, and the order to do it.

My aunt was released to the Courage Center for months of rehab so she could continue to live her life to the best of her ability. She grew up in the Catholic faith and having been divorced once, didn't feel as if she was accepted in the eyes of the Lord. I started reading to her from the Bible and took Pastor Z's taped sermons to her. She even started to enjoy our fellowship time. The verse that I kept repeating to her is now one of my favorite passages from Romans 10:12-13:

*For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—
the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses
all who call on Him, for, "Everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

When my aunt left this world, I believe that she had asked God for forgiveness and had accepted God into her life. I also believe that she and I will be reunited in our God's heavenly home.

My faith and strength in the Lord has continued to grow and flourish as I get older and situations in my life change. I have struggled with my role as a parent and provider, as we all do, but I now know God is there with me to help and guide me through both good times and bad. I still continue to ask God for strength and wisdom which He provides to me on a daily basis. As I am reminded in one of my favorite passages, Philippians 4:13:

*I can do everything through
Him who gives me strength.*

— JUDY WINTERS

**Naked I came from my mother's womb,
and naked I will depart.
The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;
may the name of the Lord be praised.**

Job 1: 21



I HAVE BEEN A MEMBER AT OUR SAVIOR NOW FOR 21 YEARS, AND counting. As some of you may already know, I am Mark and Elaine's son and I was brought up in a Christian home. I obviously haven't been the perfect child, but pretty much was an obedient and compassionate son, or at least I thought I was.

It was about 12 years ago, that I got diagnosed with bipolar disorder, which is, simply put, a mood disorder. This all started when I was starting high school at Mayer Lutheran in the fall of 1996. This made me very anxious about going to a new school, considering that I barely knew anybody. I remember not wanting to go to school, skipping classes and avoiding associating with anybody new. Let's face it, I was a real mess and wanted to know why God had given me this affliction.

Thankfully, I had a loving and supportive family who cared and loved me for who I was, and wanted to do nothing but help me get better. After another day of being stressed out and depressed, I chose to go over to my Grandpa Judd's house. I wanted to ask him for advice, and ask how he got through some of his tough times growing up, considering he grew up during the Great Depression. He told me what helped him was just simply praying, getting down on his knees and talking to God

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

freely from the bottom of his heart. He also recommended reading the book of Job in the Old Testament. Now I have to admit, I liked the first statement he made, but was reluctant to do the second, which reminded me of the confirmation days with Pastor Zahrte. (No offense Pastor!)

After a lot of praying and pleading with God I still felt kind of lost. So I got to thinking, maybe I should just do what my Grandpa says and read the book of Job. After all, what do I have to lose? So I started reading Job, and after I finished I was just amazed at how much suffering Job had gone through. Most importantly, he never once cursed God's name for any of it. After reflecting and doing a little more praying, I felt empowered and thanked the Lord for releasing me from Satan's grip. I also realized too that, like Job, it wasn't God who was giving me these afflictions, it was Satan. God may have allowed the suffering to transpire, but He surely wasn't the one causing me this pain.

In conclusion, I feel like I have been reborn and feel I have a new beginning in life. Granted, I may have a bad day or two, however, I know I am not fighting alone this time and have reassurance of victory through the Lord Jesus Christ! He alone is why I am what I am today and the One who sees me through by the power of His mercy and grace. Praise to God!

— ERIC TAGGATZ

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding.**

PROVERBS 3:5



PROVERBS 3:5 HAS BEEN MY FAVORITE VERSE SINCE I WAS EIGHT YEARS old. At that time, one of my siblings was very ill. I had begun to believe that it was my fault because I was sick before he was. As a family, we started to repeat Proverbs 3:5 together which says:

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding.”*

After we started repeating this verse, I began to realize that it was not my fault and that God had a plan though this hard time. After that time period, I started saying it myself. I still go through hard times and some times I just don't understand, but saying this verse makes it easier to get through it. For example, it really helped when I lost a grandma and grandpa within three months. I may have lost two grandparents, but God had put many other “grandparents” in my life.

I don't know what the future holds, but I do know that I can always trust in God with His everlasting love and forgiveness. I know I can always count on Him and that He has a special plan for my life. By repeating this verse it will help me remember that I need to trust God. Because of my sinful nature I tend to lean on my own understanding, but all I need to do is ask for forgiveness. I know that I will be forgiven because Jesus died on the cross for me.

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

This verse helped me when I went to Ocean Springs, Mississippi to repair homes after Hurricane Katrina and Greensburg, Kansas to help with damage from the tornado which destroyed 95% of this small town. I trusted in God to lead me to where the help was needed most, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. I was not only rebuilding homes, but lives too. After I went to Greensburg, Kansas I realized how blessed I am and that I just need to trust in God for everything.

God has led me to do many things and for some reason they all turn out to relate to my favorite verse, Proverbs 3:5:

*“TRUST in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding.”*

— ALICIA KUHLMANN

**“The rain came down, the streams rose,
and the winds blew and beat against that house,
and it fell with a great crash.”**

MATTHEW 7:27



KNOW OUR HEAVENLY FATHER? KNOW THE SON? KNOW THE HOLY Spirit? Not So Much!

My faith was built “upon the sand.” In Matthew 7:27, Jesus says,

*“The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew
and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

My childhood was different. My mom and dad had different religions, so they didn’t teach us about Jesus. We had a family next door with kids, so they invited me to go to Sunday school. In middle school, I quit going to Sunday school, but the love of Jesus was in my heart—I wanted to belong to the “family” of Christ. I visited churches with friends and joined the Lutheran church. The pastor was a “shepherd” and told me I was a child of God. I was baptized and confirmed the day my classmates were confirmed.

Then I met some of the “storms” of life. My values were tested. Without a belief that I was as good as others, I didn’t try my best. I mostly wanted to get out of my parent’s house. I thought being a wife and mom would make me happy. I married someone who was a different religion—and we didn’t feed our faith with the Word of God, except in separate churches on Sunday. That left me with pretty shallow roots—I forgot I was

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

in God's family. I made some bad choices trying to make myself feel better. I kept going to church and even started my two kids in Sunday school, but I didn't put my life in God's hands.

When self-will and still looking for "that missing ingredient" in life led my husband and I to treatment for alcoholism, I faced some truths. No, God hadn't left my side. He didn't desert me, I turned away from Him. I wasn't "hearing" His Word and didn't remember He was the solution to my emptiness. He could fill me with His goodness and worth if I let him. That was over 30 years ago.

That's when I realized my "house" of faith was built upon sand. By turning my life over to God, I began to build a firm foundation in His Word, trusting only in Him, and then my foundation was made of stone. A foundation so strong, that when life's tests and temptations come along, He gets me through. He helped me see that the Holy Spirit was there all the time. How else did a teenager "seek" a church on her own? How else did I stand firm on my Lutheran theology that we are "saved by God's grace" in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9) and not change religions to make someone else happy? Who else but the Holy Spirit filled me with the courage to get me and my kids to church, instead of not teaching them, as my parents did? Why didn't I want to drink more than I wanted our family life, so I learned about alcoholism and treatment? The power of the Holy Spirit restored me to sanity and brought me back to the feet of Jesus.

If your life isn't "right"—if you're seeking something to make you feel better, turn to Jesus. He promised us that we would not be alone. He promised the Holy Spirit to guide us and help us through. We all have to live life as it comes to us—including families that we disappoint and that disappoint us. Sometimes we lose loved ones to accident or disease. Sometimes we lose money or jobs or security by financial changes. All of these changes and losses bring sadness and insecurity. God's love

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

through the Holy Spirit can get us through that—granting us courage, companionship, and grace. All the promises in God’s Word are fulfilled in us. I know—I looked a lot of places outside of me—when I had God’s love and care within me all the time. I hope you can find a full relationship with God through the Holy Spirit.

— SUE GUENTHER

Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

I PETER 1:18



IT WAS JANUARY 3, 1993. I WAS 26 YEARS OLD WHEN, WITH TEARS rolling down my face, I raised my hand for the altar call and accepted Jesus into my heart as my Lord and Savior. The tears were fear for officially leaving my Jewish family and the tears were for the incredible peace and forgiveness I felt as the Holy Spirit came in.

It was almost 40 days from the time a friend introduced me to Jesus to that day when I became a believer. But in reality, it was a lifetime of searching for something to fill the void I felt in my faith.

I grew up in a very conservative Jewish family in Winnipeg, Manitoba, went to a private Jewish school where I was fluent in Hebrew by 3rd grade, had a Bat Mitzvah at 12 years old, was confirmed into the Jewish faith at 15, and celebrated Shabbat every Friday with my family and all the other Jewish holidays. But yet, I never had a relationship with God as I have now.

It happened when my cousin introduced me to a boy named David Lee, a Baptist Christian, who had just moved from Texas and didn't know many people in the area. Knowing how I was pretty outgoing and involved in sports and other activities, she asked me to show him around. We met at Perkins and began the usual small talk. Somehow within our conversation, he

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

casually asked me what it was like to be Jewish, or something like that, and the conversation turned to faith, and then to him telling me about his faith in Jesus. He even had a Bible in his car that he ran out to get. Three hours later, we were still sitting in the booth and I had no idea how that evening would change my life—on earth and for eternity.

He showed me scripture where what Isaiah prophesized came true in Jesus, and even explained that what I grew up doing at the Passover Seder was symbolic of Jesus' death and resurrection, down to the analogy of the head of the household breaking the middle matzah, (Afikoman) wrapping it in a white cloth and hiding it for the kids to find. It was just like Jesus being crucified on the middle cross, wrapped in cloth and buried in the tomb. At the Seder, you can't continue the meal until the Afikoman is found. Just like you can't have eternal life until you find Jesus in your heart.

David and I continued to hang out and study together and I was so hungry for what he had to say. Plus, the Southern drawl and his big blue eyes weren't too hard to take either!

I began reading the Bible on my own, got out my old Hebrew torah scripture and compared the two. It was the same Bible! Growing up, I had been reading the Bible all along and didn't even know it.

Since the day I accepted that Jesus is truly God and that He lives in me, my life took an immediate turn, and it wasn't all for the good. Telling my family that I believed in Jesus was really tough. It was one of the few times I saw my dad cry. My father, who I was so very close to, wouldn't talk to me for weeks. He wrote me a letter and told me that it felt like I was dead to him, that I had disappointed him to the point where he didn't know that he could forgive me and resume our relationship. David told me that it would be hard and showed me the verses where

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

the Bible talks about how it will turn a child against their parents. That was a little comforting, but it still hurt so much.

The positive changes are much more fun to talk about. As soon as the Holy Spirit entered me, I felt such love, such peace. I put an end to some behaviors I am not too proud of today, I regularly attended church service, sometimes even for all three services in one day, and I began writing in a prayer journal. I knew I had found the missing piece of my life puzzle, the piece that made me complete. I am so blessed to be one of God's chosen Jewish people who also received His gift of eternal life. God has showered blessings on me with Paul, two children, good health and mending my relationship with my family. While my parents couldn't bring themselves to witness Grant's baptism, two years later they did attend Nicole's baptism and you will see them at all the kids' Christmas programs.

It's hard to put into words what it feels like to be a Christian, but it is wonderful! I know that God is with me every minute, whether it is helping me get through a tough time or an illness, answering my prayers and listening to my daily chatter. He gives me strength. He gives me the joy that I realized was lacking. I don't know what ever happened to David Lee. I know that someday I will see him in heaven. When I do, since I will have a much better voice there, I will sing him the song by Ray Boltz "Thank you, for giving to the Lord, I am a life that has changed." I pray that all who read this can find the same joy that can only be found through our Savior Jesus Christ.

— DEB NIEBUHR

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

1 JOHN 5:13

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...”

EPHESIANS 2:8-9



THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS I’VE EVER BEEN ASKED...

“If you were to die tonight, are you absolutely certain you’re going to heaven?”

“And if you did and you were standing at the gates of heaven and God asked you, ‘Why should I let you into My heaven?’”

These two questions changed my life forever when someone from church came to my home almost thirty years ago and asked me to answer them. My reply to the first one was, “I hope so, I think so, and I don’t think anybody can know for sure.” I was led to 1 John 5:13.

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

To the second question I had a long list of reasons why I should be allowed into heaven: “I was baptized, confirmed, went to church regularly, sang in the choir, taught Sunday School and Vacation Bible School, etc.”

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

I was led to Ephesians 2:8–9.

*“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—
and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...”*

Growing up during the Depression and always hearing my mother say, “You don’t get nothing for nothing in this world, you work hard for everything,” led me to a real misconception of what faith was all about. I never understood that heaven is a free gift and that there was nothing I could do to earn it or deserve it. As a child, I also heard lots of sermons on fire and damnation, more than about God’s grace and love, so I tried to be “good enough” and could always find someone who was a worse sinner than I was, and I didn’t have to look very far. I was led to Romans 3:23.

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

I also grew up in an alcoholic home where there was lots of verbal and physical abuse, worry and fear, and I had no sense of peace in my life. I had a difficult time with trust since my earthly father had let me down so many times, and consequently, it was hard for me to trust my heavenly Father. I had two brothers who followed in their father’s footsteps, also became alcoholics, and both died in tragic alcohol related accidents. Except for the grace of God, I could have gone down that same path.

Eventually I got into an evangelism training program at church and discovered what I had was a “religion,” not a “relationship with the Lord.” I had heard all my life the story of the birth of Jesus and His death and resurrection, and had an intellectual knowledge of Jesus Christ, but had never totally surrendered my life to Him as my Lord and Savior. I heard in a message once that it takes the longest to get the seventeen inches from our head to our heart, and I finally “got it.”

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

At that point in my life, I got into faithfully studying God's Word and am so grateful for His leading me to the wisdom, revelation and truth and a very personal relationship with Him. I was able to let go of a very painful childhood and am learning to trust Him, and above all, finding peace in my life, as I yearn for the kind of peace that surpasses all human understanding. I am committed to serving Him totally but for the right reason, not to earn my salvation, but out of gratitude for all He's done for me.

When my husband died seven years ago, I was led to my favorite Bible verse, Jeremiah 29:11:

*“For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord,
plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.”*

I claim it daily. It's exciting to see how God is working in my life as I pray daily for Him to “use me,” the two most dangerous words we can pray.

— MARLENE DOHENY

**And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

PHILIPPIANS 4:7



BY 1949, I WAS BAPTIZED AND CONFIRMED IN THE NORWEGIAN Lutheran Church of Ellendale, now an ELCA church. I still have my Sunday School lessons and confirmation books. I attended Bible camp and, if anyone had asked me, I would have said I was a Christian. I believed in, but had no personal relationship with the Lord.

However, I chose nursing as a career and that involved working many weekends. I attended the University of Minnesota and worked at the University Hospital. I drifted farther from involvement in the church. I worked at Fairview Hospital and then obtained my Master's degree in Boston which further diminished any thought of church attendance. During this time, I drifted farther and farther from giving any thought about faith. However, even though I had forgotten Him, He had not forgotten me.

After I married my husband, who was not a Christian, and helped raise his two children, six and nine, I felt the need to return to church. Our Savior Church looked somewhat like my home church, so I started going there. Pastor Klemp visited me and I joined the church.

My mother had been praying for me all these years. After reading *The Late Great Planet Earth* and attending Bill Gothard seminars plus attending Bible classes in our church and our neighborhood, I realized that I did not have a personal relationship

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

with Christ Jesus. I prayed for Him to take over my heart and life. That was in June of 1975. My mother passed away in August of 1975. Her last birthday gift to me was the *Living Bible*. At the time she died I was not told that she had already died. I had to drive to my home town and was very upset as were the kids. About half way down there all of a sudden a great peace descended on me as if Jesus had put His arms around me. I thought that meant that she would be all right. All that week of planning and attending the funeral with all of the relatives coming to stay, whenever I would think I couldn't go on, that peace would come. The Lord got me through that sad time and has been with me ever since. Having daily devotions and reading the Bible even when I don't feel like it helps to keep me close to Him. I appreciate Our Savior Church which keeps close to the Word when many churches are changing. I know that I will at last see the Lord when He takes me home to heaven. Praise God!

— DONNA RHODES

**“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone
who asks you for the reason for the hope that you have.”**

I PETER 3:15



WHILE LISTENING TO THE CONFIRMATION SERVICE THIS FALL THE VERSE
from 1 Peter 3:15,

*“always be prepared to give an answer to everyone
who asks you for the reason for the hope that you have,”*

prompted me to respond to Jerry’s request for a faith story.

I feel I’ve always had the Lord’s hand on my life, but I didn’t really accept His presence until I was in my mid-thirties, thanks mostly to a believing wife. She gave me a Living Bible while I was in treatment for alcoholism. I remember actually reading it for comfort and support not just mechanically as in the past.

While attending an Alcoholics Victorious meeting (a Christian AA) in 1977, I accepted Christ as my Savior and Lord and ever since I can say my life has been a great adventure. To touch briefly on the reason for my hope in a faithful Lord: overcoming a debilitating depression and addiction, enjoying a greater curiosity for God’s world, four dear children, two great daughters-in-law and two dear grandchildren, exciting and enriching jobs in different parts of the country, a soul mate for a wife, the most caring church family possible and a heart felt and intellectual understanding of God’s presence and reality of Christ’s atonement.

I thank God daily for these blessings and also read His Word for guidance and understanding. We’ve had many answers to

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

prayer, the latest being *not* having to move out of state and away from our children.

With the blessing of faith I am less fearful of the future and have a sense of joy that comes from knowing I will have a home with Christ and my family in heaven. I cannot imagine a life without Jesus Christ.

Praise be to God!

— RAY FRIGARD

**Each one should use whatever gift he has
received to serve others, faithfully administering
God's grace in its various forms.**

I PETER 4:10



GOD'S HELP IN TIME OF NEED IS YOU.

God gives you all of the skills you need to serve him. He can provide the opportunity to work for Him, even if you do not know it and even when you think you are the one looking for help. Take for instance some 25 years ago when I was a teenager living in a small midwestern farm community. I was on the shy end of introvert, able to blend into the woodwork at any social gathering. To make matters worse, I was not athletically talented. A friend from church was on the high school swim team, so I would join the crowd that hung out in town at the home of one of the swimmers. This swimmer and her brother lived there with their mom. Her mom had been divorced and they never had much money. They were very outgoing, though, so everyone wanted to hang out there including an introvert like me.

One night I left my after school job and drove by that house to see if my friend and the gang were there. It looked like no one was home. I was sad thinking it would be another lonely drive out into the country. Normally I would never stop at this person's house unless my friend's car was there, but that night I felt compelled to stop, even though the driveway was empty. I planned to use the excuse of asking if perhaps the others were coming by later (so I could blend into the woodwork).

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

It turned out that she and her mom were home alone and the place was uncomfortably solemn. Her mom excused herself and left us alone. Though my mind was desperately trying to think of an excuse to leave, her uncommonly dark mood bothered me. I asked her what was troubling her. She started crying and told me she thought her boyfriend had gotten her pregnant and her mom was really mad. Though a shy teenage boy like me would have never thought of doing it at any other time, I took her hand and just held it. I silently prayed that God would give me something to say and then tried to reassure her that things would be O.K.

I left a while later thinking she needed a real friend that night and I was sorry that I, more of an acquaintance, couldn't help her more. Perhaps I should call one of her friends to provide real help, but I didn't know if she had told anyone else yet. I went home thinking that a "blend into the woodwork" introvert was not very useful to God.

It was a couple days later, after she learned that she was not pregnant, she confided in me an additional secret. That night, after the argument with her mom, she was suicidal. She said that my stopping by and holding her hand had given her the hope she needed to face the situation. God had used me to avert a tragedy. This shy introvert who felt unprepared, or able to help, was placed in the right spot, at the right time, to serve.

That day I learned that serving God does not require great athletic ability or being an extrovert who can grab people for Christ on street corners. God will use your strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures to serve Him in this world. Those instances may not be hero moments where you feel great success and receive instant gratification, but they are His moments. All it takes to serve Him is to follow Him daily and pray "God, please use me today."

— ANONYMOUS

**“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me,
and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.”**

JOHN 6:37

**For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous
for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.**

I PETER 3:18



I WAS RAISED IN A LOVING CHRISTIAN HOME AND WE ATTENDED A Lutheran church and Sunday school just about every Sunday. I learned about Jesus and many Bible stories. I would say that I knew *about* God but I didn't really *know* Him personally. I didn't know that you could have a personal relationship with God. I believed that God and Jesus existed and I heard about Jesus dying on the cross for sin. But I didn't understand where I fit in that picture, until a few years later. Actually, I naively thought that everyone was a Christian.

On June 11, 1970, when I had just turned 13, our home in Springdale, Arkansas, was totally destroyed by a tornado. We had no storm shelter or basement and there was no warning! It was storming and it was pitch black outside. My mom, dad, sister and her girlfriend and I heard a loud roar. It sounded like a huge jet was flying toward our house. We all hit the floor and our parents laid on top of us to protect us. Our house took a direct hit! Large clusters of brick fell on us. Within a few seconds the storm was over. It was totally calm outside. There's no doubt that God and His angels were with us that night! Though my

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

mom, sister and her friend suffered many injuries, my parents saved our lives by shielding us from the flying bricks and debris.

*“He (God) heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.”*

PSALM 147:3

Fast forward to another storm—my turbulent high school days. Like many teens, the things of the world often look more appealing on the surface than church services and living for God. Feeling pressure to please my friends I gave in to drinking booze and smoking pot. Soon I became a partier, going to disco joints and night clubs. I knew I was living at odds with the values my parents taught me, but I pushed those feelings away. I wanted to be cool, to fit in and be accepted. But I paid a big price. I was searching for something, but I ignored the deeper cravings of my soul. This lifestyle continued for about seven years. I didn't care much about anything or anyone and I felt empty. Nothing I tried really made me feel good about myself. I just kept filling myself with the world. At age 22, I was broken and confused. No peace, no joy, no true friends and no self worth. The emptiness inside began to gnaw at me as I wondered, “Is this all there is in life?” I didn't know what was missing. I assumed it was that “right girl” who would bring me happiness and fill that void. I never imagined the missing piece could be God.

God began working in small ways to show me that He loved me. It never occurred to me that He wanted to be a Friend, that He was interested in me. Of what use could He have with me? One day a friend of my dad's stopped by the cabinet shop for a visit. His name was Andy. He was different because he had this happiness that bubbled out of him. I thought, “This guy's a little different!” He told me, as he grinned, in front of my dad that I'd be back in church again soon. I smiled and thought, “What makes you so sure? You don't even know me.” He was right.

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

God began working through people. I started going to church with this girl I had met. Looking back, I realize that God used this girlfriend to get me back into church and to let go of the pot. One Sunday in church, God spoke to my heart in a powerful way through Pastor Hendrick's message. I was convicted of my sin and knew I was on the road to hell. I was scared. I didn't want to go to hell. But, then he told us about the love, mercy and grace of God in sending His Son to die on the cross and pay for all of my sins. I was so relieved and thankful that Jesus would do this for me. I knew I deserved God's wrath. But He was giving me mercy instead! Even as I write this nearly 30 years later, I cry tears of joy. I am alive in Christ. I am free from this bondage. I'm also a work in progress. I have a long way to go. God gave me a desire to help others experience this freedom and total forgiveness that I have received.

God is so good to put so many different people in my life who loved me unconditionally—my family and many friends at church. I can't put into words how they have touched my life.

What about you? Where are you at in your relationship with God? Do you realize how much He loves you? Look at the cross. That's proof! *Jesus*, with outstretched arms, *died* two thousand years ago, *for you!* His arms are open wide for you to come home to Him. He will receive you. Just ask Him, call on His name and He will set you free; He will give you eternal life and write your name in the Book of Life. This is the gift of God!

— JERRY ROSAMOND

For if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless.

I CORINTHIANS 15:13-14



I GREW UP IN A CHRISTIAN FAMILY, ATTENDING CHURCH USUALLY THREE times per week. Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday nights. Although most of the programs were usually well done, and I did enjoy seeing my “buddies,” there were times when I wish we did not have to go to church so often. In our family, however, you did not “skip” a church event unless you were deathly sick, or the world was coming to an end. I have to admit, that I really had a problem with our church’s over-emphasizing certain legalistic issues such as: church attendance, looking and acting clean cut, etc. A person who smoked, drank beer or danced was surely headed to hell in a hand basket (literally).

Looking back at my teen years, I now believe that this conservative upbringing was probably more advantageous than harmful (at least physically), although I always believed (and still do today) that there was a big difference between being “religious” and that of being a “Christ-follower”.

I personally chose to place Christ at the center of my life as a teenager at a summer Bible camp. This was a very meaningful decision which the Holy Spirit led me to make. I really cared about my spiritual future. I cared so much that I began to question almost everything that I had been taught in church all those years.

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

For the first time in my life I really wanted to take “ownership” of this Christianity business which (up to this point) had been brainwashed into my head. I remember actually questioning the validity of Jesus Himself—did He *really* exist historically? Was He *really* crucified and did He *really* come back from the dead? (Don’t most dead people just stay dead?) As the list of questions grew, I began to be concerned with my faith and my future salvation. This was really quite scary for me. I wanted answers; while at the same time I was afraid that I might be losing my faith in the process.

I remember confiding in one of the high school youth volunteers that I was questioning everything that I had been taught about the Christian faith, and that I was concerned that I may not go to heaven as a result of my questioning. I was really surprised and relieved to hear his response. He explained that the simple fact that I was questioning everything was actually a sign that I “really” cared about what and why I believe. He showed me a verse in the Bible which basically said that God was not too big on “lukewarm” believers. He assured me (through Biblical references) that I was in good company with many other “skeptical” Christians.

From that time on until today I have had many of my questions answered, and at the same time I continue to have questions, and I continue to find real answers. For me, the Jesus whom I place my faith in must be the same Jesus of history. I am a follower of a historical Person who claimed He was God’s Son. The apostle Paul wrote, if Jesus did not *really* die for our sins, and if Jesus was not *really* resurrected from the grave, then our faith is in vain! (see 1 Corinthians 15:13-14) I am sure glad my faith is *not* in vain!

— ANONYMOUS

**“And my God will meet all your needs
according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”**

PHILIPPIANS 4:19



I LOST MY JOB ON NOVEMBER 6TH, AND AS YOU ALL KNOW, THIS IS A VERY difficult economic time for our country. I started my job search immediately and updated my resumé and references, received two letters of recommendation from physicians for whom I have worked, and did lots of networking and research at the library.

I interviewed for a position at a family practice clinic. The interview went well, and I was called back for a second interview. The second interview went well also, and I thought I had a good chance of landing the job. The office manager told me she had over 50 people applying for this job, so I felt good that I made it to the second interview. The next morning I received a call that they offered the position to the other applicant and that I was their second choice. I was devastated by the news because I thought all the signs were there that I would get this job.

I was on my way home from the library doing more research, and I felt the need to pray. I belong to a church in Eden Prairie but had felt let down by the lack of support I had been receiving from them. I remembered someone I had met at a bookstore a couple of years ago who had told me about Our Savior Lutheran in Excelsior. He told me it was a wonderful place and he invited me to come and check it out sometime. As I was driving home

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

from the library that evening, I recalled that conversation and found myself driving to Our Savior Lutheran.

It was around 4:45 or 5:00 p.m. I went up to the front doors of the church. I tried to open the door, but it was locked, so I started walking down the stairs to try another door. All of a sudden, this kind voice says to me, “May I help you?” I told the gentleman that I wanted to come in and pray. He just happened to be at the door at that particular time, and he let me inside. It was dark inside as it was the end of the day, and he turned on the lights and walked me down to the front of the church. We sat in the front pew, and I told him my story about how I had lost my job recently and was devastated when I had two interviews for the same job but had found out that day I did not get the job. I also had lost my mom a little over a year ago and that I really missed her and needed her right now.

This kind man listened to my story and prayed with me, and he invited me to come to a service at Our Savior Lutheran. I found him to be very compassionate and understanding. I knew that he was at that door for a reason that night when I went there to pray.

I went to a service the following Sunday, and I was overwhelmed by the caring nature of the people at Our Savior Lutheran. I was introduced to many people with whom I exchanged phone numbers.

The following week, one of the members invited me to a Christmas play, and I was also invited to go Christmas caroling that Saturday. I went to the play, and I also went Christmas caroling that Saturday afternoon and met more wonderful people! It was amazing to me how all of these wonderful people embraced me and made me feel so welcome!

I had told this story to a friend of mine, and she was so impressed with my story. I invited her to come with me to a service, and she came to Our Savior the following Sunday. I

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

introduced her to the people I had met and she left the service that Sunday feeling very overwhelmed by the caring nature of the people at Our Savior!

I believe the gentleman who was at the locked door that evening at just the right time was put there for a reason...to open the door for me and invite me in and to listen to me and pray with me. I believe things happen for a reason...and we need to put our faith in God and He will guide us and lead us in our lives and He will always provide for us. At this point, I have not been blessed by a job yet, but I'm still looking and I'm depending and trusting in Jesus Christ that He has something for me at just the right time. I've been clinging to one of God's promises from Philippians 4:19:

*“And my God will meet all your needs
according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”*

By sharing our faith and our love in Christ with people who are going through a difficult season in life, even people trying to get into the church to pray, we can all become contagious Christians!

— LINDA NIEMEYER

**“Give all your worries and cares to God,
for He cares for you.”**

I PETER 5:7



WE’VE ALL BEEN THERE BEFORE—A “FORK IN THE ROAD” WHERE WE have to make major decisions with a situation in our personal or professional life.

I’m one of those people that is always busy planning. I figure the better I have things planned, the better they will turn out. I used to think if I can control my actions, I can control the way my life will go. If I work hard enough and wait long enough, I’ll attain all I wish. But as life has taken unexpected twists and turns, I’m coming to realize that that’s its not my thoughts or actions that dictate my life. It’s God’s plan that sooner or later will come to be, despite my help or hindrance.

As it says in Ecclesiastics 11:4-6:

“If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done. God’s ways are as hard to discern as the pathways of the wind, and as mysterious as a tiny baby being formed in the womb. Be sure to stay busy and plant a variety of crops, for you never know which will grow—perhaps they all will.”

And James 4:13-15:

“Look here, all you people who say, ‘today or tomorrow we will go to a certain town and stay there a year. We will do business and make a profit.’ How do you know what will happen tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

*a little while, then its gone. What you ought to say is
‘if the Lord wills us to, we will live and do this or that.’*

These verses teach us that we don't have to give up planning and striving for what we want out of life—the sincere efforts we make toward our goals do count, but they are not everything. We can't wait for conditions to be just right before moving ahead—we have to plan with faith—faith that good things will result from our actions. By truly trusting in God we don't have to do it all ourselves, he is there to take our burdens from us. As it says in 1 Peter 5:7,

“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares for you.”

Letting that control go has been hard for me. I've always seen myself as the ruler of my own destiny. Like I am sometimes stubborn in life, I also feel like I've been stubborn with God, not fully “giving him the reins” of my life. But in studying the Scriptures, I come across words like Psalm 32:8-9 that make me stop and re-evaluate:

“The Lord says, I will guide you along the best pathways for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Don't be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control.”

At times when things I've worked toward are crumbling, or things I've wished for seem just out of my grasp, like most people, I wonder, *why is this happening? What am I doing wrong? Why can't I make this work?* I read this wonderful story once, and I think of it often—it's called “Unrest in the Nest.”

“A farmer's attention was drawn to a bird that way busily engaged in building a nest. Unfortunately, the spot it had chosen to build was a heap of dead branches recently pruned from some trees. Realizing that this was a dangerous place for hatching a brood of songsters, the farmer

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

destroyed the work of the industrious bird. The next day, the persistent bird tried again, and for a second time, the farmer thwarted her efforts. On the third day, the bird finally constructed her nest on a limb near the man's kitchen window. This time he gave an approving smile and let it remain. The unsafe pile of branches from which he had twice driven her was burned long before the bird's eggs were hatched."

Our idea of right choices and safe places and God's idea of right choices and safe places can be two different things. Once I was in a job that seemed perfect for me. Then changes within the company, changes with clients, and a company bankruptcy led to my layoff. I would not have chosen this path, but there it was—my nest dumped on the ground. I keep thinking, perhaps God is stirring my nest with these situations. But I realize that God knows what will suit me best. My job is just to listen and trust Him.

It's sometimes hard to "let go and let God"—to live one day at a time. Sometimes, drawing near to God "shakes" our lives. Sometimes it takes the tearing of our nests, the unraveling of our hope and dreams, and the canceling of our appointments to understand God's plan for our lives. In the end, just like that little bird, we are safe and secure in our heavenly Father's strong and loving arms.

— BETH PURSLEY

What is your story?



PERHAPS YOU HAVE BEEN INSPIRED OR TOUCHED BY ONE OF THESE “Contagious Stories” and would like to have the same hope, power and assurance of God for yourself. Be assured that God’s grace and love is available to everyone.

Our hope is that you have been encouraged and emboldened in your faith. Maybe you have questions about your relationship with God. There are many thoughts on how to have a stronger relationship with God, but the reality is He has already done everything for you. All you need to do is confess your wrongs to God and place your trust in Jesus and His finished work on the cross for you.

*“If we confess our sins (to God),
He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins
and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

1 JOHN 1:9

*“I write these things to you who believe
in the name of the Son of God so that you may know
that you have eternal life.”*

1 JOHN 5:13

Jesus suffered and died a terrible death on the cross to show His love for the world and He rose triumphantly from the grave to show that He is God and to guarantee eternal life to all who believe.

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

We encourage you to pause right now and pray to the Lord your God. Just talk with Him as you would talk to a good friend. He knows all about you. He loves you and promises to hear you. Remember, this is a relationship between you and God. While saying a prayer does not save anyone, perhaps these words (or your own words) spoken to God will help you get started with expressing what is in your heart to Him:

Dear God, I've sinned against You in my thoughts, words and actions. Please forgive me. I cannot make myself clean or acceptable in Your sight. Thank You for sending Jesus to die on the cross for me and by the power of His resurrection, make me alive. Help me to turn from my sins every day and follow you. I want to live my life for Your glory. But even when I fall into sin, You have forgiven me through Your gift of faith in Jesus, my Savior and Lord. I am grateful for Your gift of eternal life. Amen

As a Christian, God calls us daily to surrender our lives to Him and live for His purposes and glory alone. God did not send His Son only to promise everlasting life to us, but what's equally as important, He saved us so we can be free to serve Him with our life today! The Apostle James said:

*“In the same way, faith by itself,
if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”*

JAMES 2:17

Paul the apostle, after declaring that salvation is a gift that we receive by grace through faith, immediately stated:

*“For we are God’s workmanship,
created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

EPHESIANS 2:10

CONTAGIOUS FAITH

We need to ask God every day for a desire and willingness to obey Him, to love Him and to spend time getting to know Him through His Word, the Bible. And, we need to worship Him, because:

“Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.”

PSALMS 145:3

Now, go in peace and serve the Lord with a joyful heart!

If you would like more information about living the Christian life or becoming a follower of Jesus Christ, write to the address on the back of this book or send an email to Jerry.Rosamond@oslcs.org.



