

MEET A MEMBER



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In 1990 at the age of 37, I experienced a series of events that were life changing. I'd been married to my wife for seventeen years and had three beautiful children. After working for fifteen years in land development, I had recently made a career change to the fire service. I hadn't been optimistic about getting the job, due to my advanced age and the fact that over five hundred applicants were testing for only three positions. As it turned out, I was the first one hired. The fire department sent me to paramedic school where I excelled and was class valedictorian. I had promoted through the ranks of the part-time fire department that I was still a member of to the rank of assistant chief, soon to assume the job of fire chief. Life was good! Rex was in charge! *(So I thought).*

But, I wasn't in charge. I had a thorn in my side. My thorn was alcohol. I'd used all the normal excuses to try to convince others and myself that my drinking was not a problem. Excuses like, I only drink beer, or I have never been in trouble with the law, or I have never missed work because of it. But now, a combination of things was leading me to seek help. First, my wife told me that she was going to divorce me if I didn't stop drinking. Second, I knew I wasn't setting a good example for my young sons. And third, I was about to assume the total responsibility for the safety and operations of the fire department and the community we served. I voluntarily entered an outpatient alcohol education and treatment program at Brighton Hospital.

It was during one of the presentations in the chapel before our small groups that I heard the words that would start a process of change in my life. There on the screen in a dated black and white video was a priest with black horned-rim glasses and a squinty smile saying, "God loves you, you are special in God's eyes." *Wow, a glimpse of a personal God!*

I had attended church and Sunday school as a child. My wife and I and our children attended church, so I had knowledge about God, Jesus and the Bible. I thought I was a Christian because I went to church and was basically a good person. I felt God watched over us seeing the good things and the bad things that we did. I thought that if I did enough good things and didn't do anything really bad I would go to heaven.

Those words, "God loves you, you are special in God's eyes" started a change. I was determined to let God do for me what I couldn't do for myself. Alcohol moved out and God moved in! The first thing I noticed was my desire for alcohol was suddenly removed. I no longer wanted to live the life of rowdiness, cursing, and heavy drinking that some firemen have a reputation of. Caring and compassion took over where hardness and indifference used to prevail.

I now had a new reliance and awareness of how God was working in my life to change me, but I still wasn't a Christian. But, God didn't give up; He wasn't through with me yet!

Four years later, even after the changes that had taken place, my wife told me she didn't love me any more and she wanted a divorce. A Christian at work knew of the difficulties I was facing and he (*of course*) knew what I was searching for. One day Ed asked me if I knew that "God loved me and wanted to have a personal relationship with me?" Then he proceeded to draw a diagram on a piece of scratch paper showing God on one cliff and me on the other cliff

separated by a valley. He told me how the valley represented my sin that separated me from God and pointed out how my attempts to reach God hadn't worked. Next, he drew a cross between the cliffs, which provided the bridge to God. Ed told me that Jesus and His death on that cross, in my place, paid the price for my sins — past, present, and future. I could not understand how that event of Christ's death on the cross so many years ago could have paid the price for the sins I hadn't even yet committed.

That night I went home and couldn't stop thinking about how *personal* Jesus is and about Him dying in my place, for my sins. That night I prayed and asked Jesus to forgive me for my sins, to come into my heart, and change me. I wanted to follow Him from now on. Ed continued to pray for me and gave me information and audio tapes for new Christians.

Soon after this, my divorce was final. My wife moved out. I had one son in college, one son in high school, and a daughter in middle school. Three months later my mother was diagnosed with bone cancer and died within a month at the age of sixty-five. Having just lost two of the most important women in my life, these were difficult times; but I now had Jesus to carry my burdens. I had a genuine peace and contentment. I had the assurance that God was in control. I knew that God would work all things together for good, because I loved Him. Shortly after this God brought me to a beautiful sister-in-the-Lord. We discovered that we each had been through difficult life situations at about the same time and that through our difficulties we had both come to know Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We talked candidly about our lives and how we could continue our spiritual growth and serve God together. Two years later Shelley and I were married. Soon after our marriage we were able to travel to Israel and we were baptized in the Jordan River.

The joy that God has put in my life is overwhelming. Here are some examples of God's grace in my life. Shelley and I have now been married almost eight years and have been blessed tremendously. This past November marked fourteen years of continuous sobriety for me. Being 'empty nesters' with five grown children ages twenty-two to twenty-nine, we were recently licensed as foster parents and have been blessed with a wonderful eight-year-old son to love and care for. God is good! God is faithful!

If you have not accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior and you can relate to any of these situations that I have written about, please know that He loves you and cares about you. In Psalm 147, God displays His majesty and affirms His *personal concern* for each of us. He **“heals the brokenhearted”** (v.3), **“lifts up the humble”** (v.6) and **“takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy”** (v.11). If He did it for me, He will do it for you too!

Because of God's gift of His Son Jesus, I have been forgiven and I have eternal life. ***Praise the Lord!***