

How God Made Me New

When I walked through those church doors with Travis and the girls for the first time in many years, fear filled my heart.

For some reason, I was completely terrified. But even greater than my fear was my desperation. My last shred of hope was that God could help me. I was so surrounded by darkness—around and within—that I wondered if others could actually see it. I was a complete mess, and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it. I had no more answers. All my options had been exhausted. And I could not save myself this time.

I never thought it was possible for God to show Himself, but I was wrong. As I listened to the pastor preach, I was entirely astounded and surprised to hear a sermon that seemed to have been written just for me. The message spoke to where I was that exact moment, and it blew my mind. It was powerful, beyond anything I had ever experienced, and I thought, The sheer probability of that alone is crazy!

Travis and I met Pastor Dan after the service. He gave us a mug filled with goodies and a pamphlet introducing newcomers to Grace. I read the pamphlet as I lay in bed that night next to Travis. Most of it seemed innocuous enough, but I was a bit startled when I read their belief statement. One by one, I read the list—thinking, these people are crazy!—while fear and defeat gripped me by the throat. What if this is simply yet another rabbit trail, like all the others?

I wondered. What if I never get better? In all my searching, all my pursuits to get better, I continually came up empty-handed. And, in that moment, it seemed this pursuit would be just like all the others. It was yet another mirage promising life that would soon reveal itself to be a lie.

“Can you read this?” I said to Travis, passing the pamphlet to him.

He read through the pamphlet as I stared at him, anxiously waiting for him to reel back in disbelief as I had. But when he finished, he simply handed it back to me and said, "It's good."

It's good? At the very least, I expected Travis to call some of these crazy beliefs into question, but he didn't. He didn't question their belief in the validity of the Bible—that it's completely inspired by God and free of all error. He didn't dispute the claim that there is only one way to heaven, through the blood of Jesus, though it seemed ludicrous to believe the blood of some guy who lived thousands of years ago could "save" us. Nor did he balk at the one belief that really had my head spinning—the claim that all other world religions are false, a result of Satan's deception.

"So you believe this stuff?" I asked.

"Yeah. There's nothing weird in there."

I set the pamphlet down on my nightstand and pondered anxiously a few moments before picking it up again. I couldn't stop myself. I had to read it again. Perhaps I was mistaken. Perhaps there's a different way to look at it. Travis—noticing my irrational behavior and knowing me well enough to realize I was thinking entirely way too much—asked, "What are you doing?"

"I just don't know how these people can believe this stuff. I mean it's just—"

"Do you know what you need to do?" he interrupted.

"What?"

"You need to get up, take that pamphlet, throw it away, and go back to church next Sunday."

I was a bit stunned by Travis's response, but I complied.

We went back to church the following Sunday and every Sunday after that, each time fully expecting the God-thing to be a fluke. How could a God so grand and so holy take notice of mere man? I thought. But time and again, Jesus faithfully showed Himself.

It wasn't just in church, either. Strange things began to happen all the time, things I couldn't explain. One night, Ella—who was three at the time—called me into her room after I had put her to bed. She said, “Mommy, you know that Jesus loves you, right?” Tears stung my eyes as I stood in her doorway, startled by her comment. We didn't talk about Jesus at home. She knew very little about God herself, yet here she was, a little three-year-old, giving a message from God to her mommy.

Another time, Avery—who was one—began crying inconsolably after bedtime, which was not like her at all. By eleven o'clock, after spending hours trying to calm her down, I felt exhausted and defeated. Nothing I did worked. So as a last resort, I threw my hands up and said a prayer, fully convinced it wouldn't work. I didn't think God could really hear me and, even if He could, I certainly didn't think He'd pay much attention to my little problems. But I stood over my little girl and prayed anyway. I asked Jesus to calm her heart and give her peace so she could go to sleep. And that moment—and

I mean that very moment— she fell asleep while I stood looking at her in amazement. Tears ran down my cheeks. You are real, I thought. You do hear me.

There are so many stories like these. It seemed God showed up daily. And I was given the proof I needed.

It was true; I couldn't save myself. So I was given grace. And as my eyes were opened, I began to see clearly for the first time. I began to see God's love. His mercy. His grace. His forgiveness. Yet I was still fighting. All along the way, I

fought as I tried to apply reason to faith. But in the end, Jesus won—as He always does. He rocked my analytical world, tore down my every argument, turned my life upside down—or perhaps right side up—and gave me life.

The moment we surrender ourselves to Jesus, we're made new. We're made alive in Christ, and this is precisely how I felt. I felt free for the first time as I began to be healed of the anxiety and depression that had held me captive for months. The joy and peace I so desperately sought finally took residence in my heart. And the void that I had been unknowingly trying to fill with worldly things—accomplishments and accolades that ultimately led me down the dark alley of my soul—was filled with the light and love of Christ.

I had been made new.

*In 2010, **Laurie Coombs** was called to forgive the man who murdered her father. What happened as a result of that journey is chronicled in her book, Letters from My Father's Murderer (Kregel, 2015). She blogs at and is a regular writer for and . Coombs and her husband, Travis, make their home in Nevada along with their two daughters and are in the process of adopting from Ethiopia. Coombs can also be found on Facebook (lauriecoombs), Twitter (lauriecoombs) and Pinterest (laurieacoombs).*