

# Sharing the Faith

by Bob Hoffman

Challenges are just opportunities in a working man's clothes. Life has many challenges and



I believe we all work through them in a lifetime to grow and learn. The following testament of my faith journey has been a challenge to write but it is through this opportunity I grow closer to God and learn more about my own self.

By the age of 16 I was a confirmed agnostic, a rationalist, and a modernist. All unfavorable labels of a young man, but I was seeped with worldly philosophies and bitter with the world politics in the late 1960's. I was raised with little religious upbringing and except for major Christian holidays, my family did not go to church.

Life for me changed dramatically however, when I became born again in Christ at an evangelistic event in Los Angeles, where I lived. AMEN.

I became engulfed with God's love and a newfound Christian family. In the mid 60's it was not uncommon to find your identity in the midst of Christian groups that professed the love of God through singing and street preaching. I became one of the main testimonial speakers with a group called Action Life. We performed and evangelized to crowds over 1000 in attendance. We spread the good news locally and abroad, and toured the United States all to spread the living word of God.

I left my parent's home at 17 and lived with 6 other Christian guys in the suburbs of Los Angeles to pray and live the life as witnesses to Christ. My bible became my life textbook. We studied the bible from cover to cover and prayed unceasingly. Prayer became our lifeblood. It was the catalyst for our faith and trust to explode in our hearts.

My involvement with Action Life opened my eyes to the joys and suffering of the Lord. I was led to travel through a series of divinely inspired events. Sharing the good news was my passion and I was blessed with an evangelistic trip to Copenhagen, Denmark where I spent 2 weeks preaching to street gangs and drug addicts, seeing miracles and converting souls to the faith. I thought I was a mature Christian at 17 because I prayed with fervor, talked like a bible scholar, monitored a suicide prevention hot line 24 hours a day from L.A. phone booths, and knew the good Lord had me right where He wanted me. I had yet to learn forgiveness of our brothers and trust in the Lord's timing.

After one final tour across the U.S., Action Life dissolved, and I was left to look for fellowship elsewhere. I drove, immersed in prayer, to an evangelistic event where I was so heavenly-bound, I missed my turnoff on the L.A. freeway and hit a light pole head on, projecting me through the windshield and out onto the hood of my crushed car. Even as I lay bleeding, I

tried to save a confessed Buddhist that stopped to help me until paramedics arrived. The Lord saved me again! AMEN.

I survived physically but my faith waned, and I took a deep dive. My parents and family moved back to the Midwest, and I was left on my own at 19 in L.A.: no friends, no church family, no relatives. I became one of the broken-hearted, the poor, the needy, the lost. I became one of the ones that I had tried to help. It was at this point in my life when the Lord became the Shepherd and Guardian of my faith. Perhaps I was no longer walking in the spirit, but the spirit was still walking with me. Even though I felt I had fallen from grace by my standards, God sent me my soul mate at just the right time. Her name was Lisa, and our love has been inseparable since that day. We married in 1976 and began a union with each other that is intertwined with the bonding of the Lord's grace and mercy. AMEN

Our young married life for the first 5 years was worldly and materialistic. I continued with my bad habits of gambling and carousing around. Life was all about us. Although we enjoyed a life of dissipation, our souls slowly fell into the pit of selfish indulgence.

But God, in His infinite wisdom, showed us the power that a child can restore love and faith. Our son came into this world to renew our faith. But when we seemed to be deep into the pit, danger came knocking at our door; I lost my job. We were in Santa Barbara, 1981 economic recession, brand new baby, no jobs anywhere. We packed up our car and moved to the Midwest. We weathered the storm of transition from city to rural America and found a job in a steel factory: blue collar, sweat shop, hard labor. Lisa was a waitress to help make ends meet.

God showed us that some things we perceive as tragedy or downfall are really meant for us to grow closer to Him. We had a second child, and our little family unit seemed somewhat complete in our small country town. We had a visitor come to the door, recruiting folks to her church. Imagine how impressed I was to have a 76-year-old lady walking door to door asking if we'd like to go to her Presbyterian church. I later became the Sunday school teacher and loved working for the Lord again. I learned the way we perceive things that happen to us determine our trust in God and His ways. My life took another turn when I broke my arm while roller skating with my son. God turned my fall and subsequent job-loss into a positive change in my life. I thought I was doing God's work and all along God was doing work on me.

My blue-collar job ended. I returned to school at 40 to become a teacher. It was a long 5 years of night school and substitute teaching. But, with the Lord's guidance, I made it! I became a 5th grade teacher for the next 20 years. Although State guidelines prohibit any religious teachings in public school, I was able to slip basic Christian ideas into my classes. Mother Theresa became an important lesson on mottos with her quote, "You can do no great things. Only little things with great love." My children learned that love is the greatest achievement a person can have. I was deeply inspired by some of the mottos coming from my students every year.

Let me skip ahead now to my 60's. Retirement on the horizon. God silently waiting and watching in the sidelines. I was too busy now with teaching and life to be involved with God

much. But God still had plans for me. My mother-in-law needed help in her final years, and my wife felt the call to be her caregiver. It was a life changing decision to move to Oregon from Missouri and live with Lisa's mother. That's when our trust in God really became necessary.

Transition was much more difficult than we had imagined. But the Lord covered us with His love and guidance. We prayed with monks twice a day for a year while God prepared us for the next phase of our life as caregivers. With honor to the Lord, we participated in RCIA for a Catholic conversion. AMEN.

In March 2018, I woke up at 3am dazed and confused, speaking babble. At sunrise we went to the Monastery to pray, knowing that God would have answers and give us direction. We prayed for His mercy and understanding. We walked around and prayed for hours not knowing what was happening. I believe the Lord was walking beside me, literally, for 24 hours. I went to the little chapel in the monk cemetery and lay prostrate on the floor at the feet of Jesus in Mary's arms, and wept. "God help me," I cried. I walked up to the main sanctuary. and one of the monks came out to me. I needed prayer, so he took me into the confessional where he prayed over me. The power of the Holy Spirit within him enveloped me as he seemed to tower above me with the mercy of God pouring through his hand on my head. He asked me if I was willing to take the cross of the Lord. I responded, "Yes, I am!" The monk left me and was visibly drained from the experience. I was still in a daze, unable to communicate, simply breathing and walking. AMEN

I finally went to a hospital. and all the tests were done to confirm that I'd had a major stroke at some point. The doctors were amazed I was walking at all; they said my organs should have been failing. They expected me to die while in the hospital. The tests showed the right side of my brain was completely non-functioning, once a living organ, soon as solid as concrete. Lisa stayed by my side while I was in and out of consciousness. She relates this part of my story.

Prayers were focused on asking God for His mercy on us. I didn't ask Why? What good would that knowledge do me? God's answer came to us later, anyway. Because it's necessary, we read in the Bible. It was more a surrender to God's will. God was in control and I trusted Him without reserve. On the third day in ICU Bob sat up in bed and said to me that Jesus had just come to him and told him, "I love you like Lazarus! Get Up!" I reached for the Bible, wanting to read more about Lazarus. It opened exactly to the scripture John 11:1-44. AMEN.

In the middle of reading it out loud to Bob, a nurse came rushing in saying, "What's going on? Stop whatever you're doing! His heart rate is off the chart!" She checked all the monitors as I explained what had just happened. AMEN. She left the room shaking her head.

The next day, a team of doctors came to the room. The head neurologist said to us that after 40 years of dealing with stroke victims, nobody had ever called their stroke a blessing as we had. After hearing of our encounter, the neurologist simply said it was interesting. Bob had seemingly recovered and maintained body and organ function in spite of 100% blockage to

half of his brain. The tests were inconclusive of the time or reason for the stroke except that it was a hereditary condition. It was a major one. The doctors had no explanation how Bob's recovery of normal automatic body functions like heartbeat, breathing, walking, swallowing, all seemed re-wired on the spot to operate in only days after the event. Although Bob couldn't read or write at first, the Lord brought these skills back to him within time. Bob had previously been a published poet, and he learned to write out his prayers in poetry form as part of his rehab. His journal can bring tears of joy from the Holy Spirit in some of his early prayers. Life is now rehab for God. AMEN

And now I've come to a point in my life for reflection and meaning of all this:

- \*Mankind, like Lazarus, will always be working to remove the funeral bandages, the imperfections we wear until we reach the heavenly kingdom.
- \*God is with us always. Especially when we're at our lowest, most vulnerable time.
- \*I found that God's voice can be heard better when we suffer as Christ and share His cross.
- \*That no matter what befalls us in life, perspective and faith are keys to finding it as a blessing. Anything can be looked at as a miracle.
- \*God loves us and forgives us unconditionally time and time again.
- \*God touches us many times throughout our lives. The Holy Spirit is our guide in life.
- \*Mottos to live by: Teach, Preach, and Serve. Submit, Accept, and Follow.
- \*His faith is sufficient. God's faith in us is always stronger than our own faith.
- \*Fervent prayer is essential for the Christian experience.
- \*God's preparation should never be ignored no matter how painful it might be. He prunes the vine for our spiritual growth.
- \*Life is a series of parables. Listen to what the Lord is teaching us.
- \*Be thankful for everything. Whether a stroke, or a car accident, or loss of income, or even being homeless. Our loving God has a Divine plan for us if we just believe and trust in Him completely.
- \*God, Our Father, is always looking out for our best interest. God is the potter and we are the clay.
- \*Trust the Lord and wait for Him to reveal His will.

**THE OLD TREE** - published in 2003

This tree of life knows no end.

As the wind blows it simply bends.

But I am just a leaf up there

Growing while the weather's fair.

Whether I turn green or gold or red,

I know for sure I'll end up dead.

Spring will bring a brand-new bud.

And I'll be laying in the mud.

That leaf will think it's something new

Hanging in the sky so blue.

Just like the leaf are you and I,

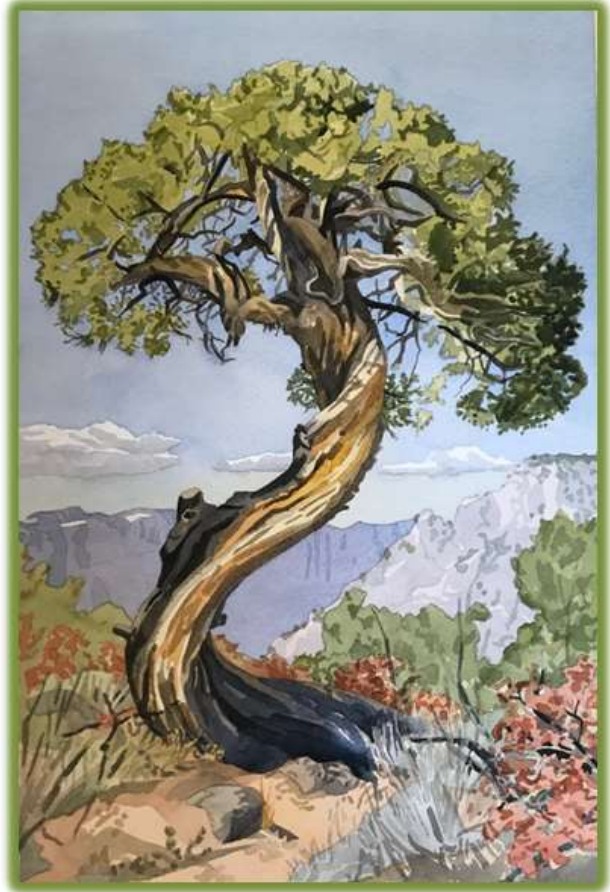
We briefly live and love and die.

That's the part that makes me sad

But now I'll tell what makes me glad.

Humanity is a grand old tree

The food it gets comes from me.



I realize that we all participate in the Resurrection of Christ through our own lives.

May the Love, Mercy, and Grace of Christ abound in your life.