

My name is "K". I am 26 years old. I am one of 3 children. I have 2 sisters. My dad was in the navy and my mother was a CNA. I come from a very dysfunctional, very broken, very oppressive family. Some of my earliest memories are of my father beating my mother. Very early in my childhood my father also began abusing myself and my 2 sisters. We were also met with neglect. We hardly saw a doctor or a dentist. On at least 2 occasions my teachers at school had notified my parents of my need for urgent and immediate medical attention and told my parents they had strongly considered reporting them to social services. When I heard my parents discussing this, I remember asking God to have them reported. They were not.

My parents were professed Catholics. We went to Mass maybe 5 times. I felt no genuine connection to God during those times. I felt a curiosity which quickly faded after having appealed to God numerous times only to be met with silence. I remember wailing uncontrollably into my pillows so no one would hear, sometimes even pulling my hair and scratching my face as a result of my deep frustration and anguish and sense of hopelessness. These cries and pleas and wails all carried the same question – why God? Why were these things happening? During this time my parents were divorced and re-married (to each other). My mom was gone for over a year. This proved devastating. All I knew was instability and apprehension. Even the good times were stained with fears and doubts. The abuse and neglect my sisters and I endured wore on our appearance much like dirty clothing did – for all to see and laugh at. As a result, I was utterly rejected and continually sneered at by my peers for the larger part of my childhood. My little self felt as if everywhere I turned I was confronted with disapproval and insults. My sisters marked the only 2 constants in my life. Somewhere in the midst of all these experiences, I had emotionally rejected the idea of a relational God. I was convinced that if He did exist, He was passive and cared nothing for His children.

Finally many years later, through an uncanny series of events the authorities were notified of what was happening. My dad was arrested and dishonorably discharged from the Navy after 19 years of service. My mother was deemed unfit to gain sole custody and we were thrust into the custody of the state. Though I wouldn't realize it for at least a decade, this heralded the beginning of God's rescue plan for my life. My sisters and I lived in a child care facility for over a year. Finally I had a voice. It was here that God showed me that there were others, many others who had it worse than I did. Had I continued to believe there were no others like me, had God not granted me this crucial perspective, the ghosts of my past would have surely chased me into a pit of depression and loneliness.

Despite the reprieve given me, I felt no inclination toward God. I felt it was the ways and systems of the world which saved me from my dad. The three of us were eventually ushered back into the custody of my mother. We all moved to Montana. What ensued was another 6 years of distress, instability, and isolation. We were poverty stricken. The 4 of us shared a 2 bedroom trailer. My mother was addicted to prescription pills, chain smoked 2 cigarette packs a day in the house, trailed various boyfriends in and out, and was always in and out of work. Food boxes and food stamps were the source of our meals. Despite all this, my hope burned bright, my fortitude took root. I was not defeated.

It was during my high school years that I began to experience what I would later refer to as, "the calling". Interestingly, I referred to this feeling as "the calling" well before I came to Christ. I felt some large, invisible, all-encompassing thing beckoning. For a while I thought of this vast unnamable thing simply as the universe or fate. Vast and unnamable it may have appeared, but close, palpable, and powerful it felt. I felt a deep desire to explore this unseen presence or design or power or whatever it was which continued to pull on my heartstrings. As "the calling" continued to declare itself, I began to identify it as more of a personality, and this personality felt familiar. Strikingly familiar. It was as if this presence and I were woven of the same cloth. Little did I know the King of the universe Himself was calling Me into His holy family.

Despite these altogether supernatural curiosities and feelings – I continued to reject the idea of God. I had for the first time in my life, a very close group of dear friends. These people are to this day some of the brightest, happiest, and most altruistic people I have ever known. They were all atheist or agnostic. My first introduction to religion and Christianity was through the madness of my parents and my first introduction to atheism was through the kind words and loving acceptance of my dearest friends. During this time, I intellectually rejected the idea of a relational God.

I graduated. I left for college. I moved to Missoula, a city 300 miles away. Not too far from home, but far enough. Life went on. The calling persisted. I in no way was flourishing or making progress or healing from all that had occurred over the previous 18 years. I was stumbling through the wilderness. My older sister "C" was still living at home with my mom

in Bozeman. My younger sister "A", who was 15, was visiting a friend of hers in Minnesota. Then tragedy struck. My older sister called to inform me that our mother pawned all of our belongings including our car and moved to Florida to be with our dad who had just been released from prison. One word came to mind – "A". What about our 15 year old baby sister? I was crushed. I felt abandoned all over again. What about "A"? I couldn't let her fall into the hands of the state all over again. Shortly thereafter "A" had returned to Bozeman from her trip in Minnesota. She came on a greyhound, arrived late at night, with 2 trash bags of belongings, and no one was there to pick her up. She called me in the dorms crying that no one was there. I was heartbroken. Quickly I decided to move back home to be there for my 2 sisters, the only remaining family I had left. My mother had called me once before I left the dorms to tell me she didn't think she had done anything wrong.

The next 5 years provided me with another season of tremendous hardship. My older sister became a stripper out of desperation. My little sister was all but lost to us. She suffered from grief and depression. She began to abuse drugs, got into trouble with the law, and began to disappear for long periods of time. All through the many sorrows and all through the joys I never once had a parent to call. I tried to be the life raft which kept my little family afloat, but at times this was impossible. There was one crisis after another. I entered into an unhealthy and destructive romantic relationship which lasted for 4 ½ years. I began smoking cannabis daily and became addicted to cigarettes. My drinking also increased considerably. Thankfully I never abused hard drugs. I tried to navigate through the hazy fog of drugs and failed time and time again. I was lost, broken, confused, and scared. I felt incapable of change. I felt fundamentally flawed. During this time I also had many medical issues. There were a number of dental emergencies. Also, I temporarily lost my vision due to a condition I developed called bilateral uveitis. Thanks be to God for restoring my vision. I didn't know how to get out of this pit. Out of desperation I began my search. In the beginning it was my search for truth. As my search progressed, like a trumpet sounding, it was made clear to me that this pure truth which I so dearly sought after, was no less than God Himself. Thus began my search for God.

Then, the most monumental thing happened - I moved to Portland.

I began to read everything I could get my hands on regarding God. I became fascinated with the eastern mystic religions. Books like Siddhartha, The Hindu Vedas, The Baghavad Gita, and The Kabbalah captivated me. Slowly I began reading more contemporary books such as, "The Celestine Prophecy", "Ishmael", "A Course In Miracles", and "Conversations With God". I became fixated on New Ageism. This was perhaps the most dangerous part of my search. These books are so very dangerous because they blend truth with falsehoods and offer it up as one seamless truth. There could be no more a spiritual slippery slope than that of New Ageism. It's self-exalting and self-directing. The author of every book I read claimed to have received special revelation from a messenger of God or from God Himself. Every single one of these books contradicted each other. This begged the question, "If indeed God did send messengers, why would He send them with conflicting messages?" Clearly, either they were all frauds or it was the work of something more sinister. I concluded that at least some of the authors really did believe they had a genuine spiritual experience. Although this didn't lead me to truth directly, it did affirm my belief in a supernatural world and in supernatural activity. I assumed that if there was deliberate deception occurring in the spirit world, so too must there be goodness in the spirit world. In retrospect, I see that these books chronicled various types of demonic activity. What's interesting to note is that every one of the books I read contradicted one another on many levels but all of them had one theme in common – they aimed to dethrone the biblical Christ. This caught my attention. Clearly these messengers were false messengers and clearly they had a common agenda. What did they have against Christ? As I continued to read these accounts, I became more confused. I had no fruit to bear for all my searching. I was deadlocked. None of it made sense. I knew God was there. I could feel Him. I prayed all the time. Prayed He would reveal Himself to me in truth.

I lived with my sister when I first moved here. She was always on the go. I had no job for almost 2 months. I had no friends. What I did have was time and a computer. Those were my only 2 resources. One night out of sheer loneliness, I ventured into a spiritualism based chat room. I met many nice people there and talked about God. It helped curb my need for social interaction. Then I met the acquaintance of one of the most influential people I would ever meet. To summarize – He was an older believer. He quickly became a mentor of sorts. He astounded me with his knowledge. This man had amassed a great deal of knowledge in science, history, and scripture. We talked about current events, art, God, history. Truly this man is gifted. He began to share with me details of Christian meditation. Naturally I began asking questions about His belief in the God of the Bible. What struck me about his answers besides the fact that he was so

astute, was how matter of fact he was. He was unapologetic. He told me 3 things. If I was to find truth it had to be a result of my own seeking and desire to know truth. 2<sup>nd</sup> he told me God had given me the ability to discern pure truth through the Holy Spirit, and 3<sup>rd</sup> any adopted truth must be consistent with scripture. Indeed, all truths to be adopted are found solely scripture. What happened next is very difficult to conceptualize. Shortly after meeting "R", it dawned on me – I'm spending all this time reading about various interpretations of truth, yet I won't even as much glimpse at a Bible. Why not? Why not at least research the Bible to find out if it can stand the test of time, if essential Christian doctrine makes sense philosophically, and intellectually. Why not research these things before I write off Christianity altogether? And so it began. I slowly pulled back the curtain of my misconceptions and began to peer into the light of Christendom. Suddenly, pieces were falling into place. Questions were being answered and questions I hadn't even thought to ask arose. My dear friend "R" continued to witness patiently and diligently. I began renting Christian videos. I was in and out of bookstores eager to read the next book addressing these Holy Mysteries. I realized the Bible is historically accurate, indeed why would it lend itself to historical scrutiny were it not? In fact among other ancient documents, it remains quite unparalleled. It was a beautiful discovery. I felt like a proverbial archeologist who couldn't quit digging. I was hungry for Jesus. I was thrilled at the mention of His name, overjoyed at His finding. I kept digging. I realized quickly that the more I felt myself starting to believe in The Word, the more I was rejecting everything I had previously adopted as true. I started to second guess myself. What was I getting myself into I thought? I am losing all semblance of everything I thought to be true. Then God showed me the following quote in the midst of my doubt. "If a thousand old beliefs were ruined in our march to truth, we must still march on." I continued to march on. I was almost there. I felt myself inching closer to faith. I began praying in the name of Jesus. I appealed to God to answer my prayers, to continue to reveal His truth to me, and to with a clear and unmistakable finality engrave the name of Jesus Christ on my heart if indeed everything that scripture said was true. I prayed for the gift of faith. I felt so close. Then it happened. It was late one night. I was crying because I was overwhelmed in doubt. Again I was confused. I knew once I believed, Jesus would become Life itself and this presented a huge risk. I had been deeply betrayed all my life. Trust was a huge step for me. All these talks of promises, of redemption, and restoration, and forgiveness seemed too good to be true. The mere depth of His love and sacrifice seemed otherworldly and implausible. His second coming, the new heavens and the new earth left me flabbergasted. The magnificence and glory of Jesus was so far-reaching it couldn't be true. I was too scared to believe. I didn't want to find out I was wrong. I began to sob and ask God to confirm Jesus in my life if He was indeed our Savior, but that I could no longer stand the confusion and not knowing. Then God showed me the verse that would change my life forever. I opened up my Bible and asked God to speak to me. He showed me the following verse:

2 Corinthians 11:3 "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

I knew that instant that I had been deceived all my life. In that moment, He revealed that everything prior to Christ had been deception and that only in Christ would I know truth and life. I remember saying, "Jesus Christ, count me as a believer, you have won me." After that utterance, I felt my heartbeat for Christ for the first time. My life has been completely transformed. Through and in Jesus Christ I have conquered all former addictions. I am returning to school in two weeks. I live in a beautiful home filled with fellowship. I have found an incredible Christian community through the church that Jesus brought me to. I am rescued, I am redeemed, I am thankful. Praise Jesus, every moment in darkness was more than worth if in the end I am delivered into His arms. My life can be encapsulated in two words - glorify God. Amen.