

MY PERSONAL CONVERSION

By Gary Stowers

I Gary Stowers plan here to make known some of the most fascinating experiences, and understanding of my personal life; my own conversion to the Word of God, and the experiences that led up to that. My hope is that this information will be helpful to many of you, including my own children, and my wife. I now can see that God was working in my life to prepare me for his calling long before I was personally aware of it. I had considered writing an extensive autobiography, but have come to the conclusion that much of the experiences of my life before conversion were sinful, and wrong, and not worthy of being told. Those experiences, both the good and the bad, have served to help me personally to learn, and also experience that my own personal way, would only produce undesirable end results. God has granted me an exceptionally good memory of my life experiences, so that after conversion I can look back over my life and continue to repent and learn that only the way of God is good and right.

Part of the way that God enhanced my memory was the way that my family which I grew up in, were constantly moving from one place to another, from one school to another and one job to another. I went to thirteen different schools in four different states, and almost finished the eleventh grade. I did go back years later and took a General Education Test and passed it. I also have sought higher education in many fields by my own personal studies, including some trade schools. We lived in many more houses and locations than the thirteen schools. We also worked in farm work such as: picking cotton, chopping cotton and soy beans, picking strawberries, cutting grapes, picking raspberries and currents, picking oranges, and later on I did some work hauling hay, and working on a ranch. We had traveled around to many different states, to work in the fruit harvest. Most of my adult life I have worked in steel fabrication, and welding in

fabrication shops as well as on many industrial construction jobs. I also taught welding at a welding school for about four years.

At all of these many different schools, houses, and jobs, memories were being made by the experiences, and with the people I encountered. The many different houses, schools, and jobs serve in my memory as dividers in a folder. I can think back to a certain state, school, house, or job, and dwell on it for a little while, and a flood of memories will come back to me very clearly in almost a picture like detail. I thank God for this blessing, for it has helped me, since my conversion, to analyze my life, both the good as well as the bad, and to be able to learn from those experiences; to hold dear the good, but to repent of the evil. This is the very reason that God allows us humans to live according to the sinful way of this world for many years before he calls us to repentance, and faith in the Gospel; which is the real hope and God designed purpose for our existence. You should read my booklet titled; THE REAL PURPOSE FOR HUMAN EXISTANCE.

I don't plan to give many bible references to what I say here in this writing, but in my other literature I do, that you may find the truth in the pages of your own bibles. I also purpose not to give sub titles to parts of this writing, for I feel that it can't be accurately divided up in that way. It is all one true story entwined in my own life and mind, then and now; as one ongoing event, with all knowledge being interconnected. It is not just about physical deeds and events of my life; but also my human nature, and my conversion to the nature of God and Christ.

The primary purpose in my writing this booklet, is to reveal the awesome way that God Almighty has worked in my life to bring me to real repentance and faith in the Gospel, and how and why I was able to make that complete surrender of my life over to God our Father, and Jesus Christ his son. You may also have experienced similar experiences in your life, or you may yet experience similar experiences when God sets his mind and hand to convert you to his way. I don't plan to write a complete autobiography, but to tell some of the events in my life which led to my conversion, and to tell of Gods marvelous love and patience in correcting me from my former way. In order to tell this true story I find it necessary to mention a few of my sins which I am now completely ashamed of,

and have truly repented of, and now hate; but they helped in bringing me to see how corrupt a man's way can become when he follows his own spirit and lusts, instead of the word of God. I mention this information only for the purpose of trying to be helpful to anyone else who may have similar experiences, and show them the way God helped me; and will help them if they can learn to believe in, and trust in the Word of God and his true Gospel. I certainly don't glory in my sinful lifestyle of the past; but I glory in the love, mercy, and power of the Great God, and his awesome involvement in my life.

I was born in 1956 at Pocahontas, Arkansas. I was the third child of seven children. My parents were poor farm workers, who had met around Truman, Arkansas. Their families were sharecroppers. Mom's family were from Webber Falls, Oklahoma, and they went down to Truman to farm cotton on a sharecrop system. That is where Mom and Dad met.

In the winter of 1960-61 Mom was taken ill of bleeding ulcers in her stomach. For months she had exhausted the doctors' ability to cure these ulcers, and was so sick and weak that she couldn't even get out of bed long enough to do her house work. She couldn't keep food down in her stomach. When she vomited it up, it was bloody. She had lost weight until she looked like skin and bones. Dad had to cook and care for us four children. Mom got out of bed one day and prayed at the end of her bed, asking God to heal her. God heard her prayer and in a very short while she was up and feeling well. She had been miraculously healed. She began gaining back her normal weight and was completely physically well. She could eat any foods that she desired with no stomach problems. She didn't have to take ulcer medicine or be troubled with ulcers for the rest of her life.

Latter we managed to be able to afford to get an old tube style radio. On that radio she began hearing Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong preaching the truth of God. She believed, but dad persecuted her very badly. He was jealous of her and was afraid that she was paying too much attention to another man. He felt that he was losing control of his wife. Mom never was baptized, because of her fear of what dad would do, though she wanted to. I remember one time she had secretly

wrote and asked for a minister to come out and baptize her. We were living in Raven den Springs Arkansas at the time. When the minister came she became paralyzed with fear of what dad would do and she had us kids to just hide in the house with her and pretend that we were not at home. Dad's jealousy had turned his heart to hate of her, Mr. Armstrong, and God. I will not mention all of the evils that she and our whole family experienced because of this; but some I must, for you to have a reasonable understanding of what led to my own way of thinking and conversion. The persecution only got worse. She took many a beating from my dad. We children hated to witness her being treated so cruel, but we couldn't do much about it. For about seven years she continued to listen to Mr. Armstrong and receive his booklets and the Plain Truth Magazine. At one point dad decided to burn all of her religious literature and try to force her to give it up. He took her religious literature out into the garden, saturated it with kerosene, and burned it while stomping on it and cursing God and Mr. Armstrong. My brother watched and told me of it. He forced her to write a letter to Mr. Armstrong telling him not to send any more literature and with hostile words. I'm not sure if she mailed it or not. After that she had to hide any more literature that she was getting from the Church of God. Dad tried to force her to work on the Sabbath, but she refused. I remember one time he decided to make us work, picking cotton until after sundown on Friday evening; Mom just sat down on her sack of cotton at sunset.

In order to stay in the "good graces" of Dad, my older brother and I also helped in the persecuting of Mom with our words. We didn't truly understand at that time why Mom was letting her religion be so important to her that she was allowing it to divide between her and Dad. I have deeply regretted my part in persecuting her ever since. As the years went by and I began to grow up a little; it became obvious to me that the Miraculous healing, as well as Mom's love, attitude and character, and willingness to suffer for her faith, was proving that her religion was the true religion of God, but I personally was not ready or willing to be obedient to God. I didn't think I could be happy if I obeyed God, and I also knew of the persecution that a Christian would suffer. It didn't appeal to me. After about seven years of persecution, suffering, and not being truly loved by her

husband she decided to give it all up. She never had been baptized nor assembled with the church brethren but she knew for certain that she was being called by God, and that Mr. Armstrong was God's minister. She said that it was for us children's sake that she didn't totally surrender to God, and get baptized. If there was any other reason, she didn't tell us. After those long miserable seven years of trying to live by the bible on her own without being baptized, and receiving the Holy Spirit; she was worn down and lost her will. She thought that she could solve her family problems by giving up her religion. She tried to comfort herself and us kids by saying that after we were all grown, that she would go back to her God and religion. She didn't seem to understand that God don't operate that way. We can't wait until everything is set up just right in our lives before we surrender to God. When God calls us we are given our chance then. She should have totally surrendered to God and been baptized and be willing to take the consequences, trusting God to deliver her from evil. I now realize that if she had; her life would have been much better. God only knows if there is any hope for her in the future resurrection and judgment of the dead or not; but one thing is for sure; whatever God's judgment is, it is based on truth, righteousness, and mercy.

That was one of the saddest days of my life, when she turned deliberately and willfully away from God. I remember that we had been picking cotton, and had sat down by the car at the end of the field to eat lunch. Mom and my older sister normally would not eat pork. At that lunch Mom took a pork sandwich and bit in to it and began eating it. My heart sank and I looked at my sister and she looked at me with the expression that said, "If mom is giving up her religion, how could I stand alone", and she also started eating a biscuit with pork between it. I felt terrible, but didn't say a word that I recall. I had been guilty of helping to persecute her with words at various times, but deep in my heart I felt that her religion was right.

After she turned away from God, things didn't get better, but only worse. She and Dad finally agreed to separate after about two more years. In the mean time my youngest brother was born, and she became pregnant with my youngest sister. She, my sisters, and baby brother came to live near her family In Webber

Falls, Oklahoma. My older brother and my younger brother who was only about eighteen months younger than me; we stayed with dad. That was not necessarily the way we chose, but that was according to their agreement. At the age of fourteen I became the cook for our split of the family. There is a lot of information that I could put in here, but that is not the purpose of this booklet. I will try to only touch on the things that seem relevant in this particular writing even though all of the experiences that I have gone through have had a part in shaping my life, and preparing me for the calling that God eventually gave me. Most people go through a complete lifetime in the sinful way of this world, and will not be called to the knowledge of the truth and judgment until the last Great Day Judgment, that is talked about in Revelation chapter twenty. But, God has allowed me to experience a belly full of sin and its results, in a rather speeded up fashion. God wanted me to learn the hardships of sin, so that he could bring me to repentance while I was very young, at the age of twenty three.

My brothers and I lived with our dad for a few months which seemed to be much longer. Dad had become so mentally deranged by demons that he had to be put in a mental hospital, in Little Rock, Arkansas. Our experiences with him were a real nightmare. My brothers and I came to Oklahoma to live with our mom. Shortly thereafter our baby sister was born. Mom was now what seemed to be free from dad, and she had all of her children with her. Some of us kids had mentioned to her what she said about returning to God someday. She didn't really seem to be very interested at that time. She lived a life that most people would consider a good and decent lifestyle, but she had developed a few friends and was not interested in trying to please God, or prepare for his kingdom. She did write in and start receiving the Plain Truth Magazine from the Church of God, and after a while she requested a visit from a minister from the Church. When the ministers came to our house, she visited with them for a while and most of us kids didn't stay and listen to what was said, but my older brother later told me that she said that she felt that she had committed the unpardonable sin by willfully turning away from God, and asked the ministers to leave. The ministers left and she never more contacted the Church. She joined a local Pentecostal church for social reasons.

A few months later in the summer of 1972 Dad was released again from the Mental Hospital, and was homeless. We felt sorry for him and persuaded Mom to let him come and live with us. She reluctantly agreed, and we brought him into our home. Mom was the head of our family and under the circumstances, she had to be. Dad was still strongly under the demons influence, and especially when he quit taking his medicine; and he didn't like mom's family arrangement. She refused to be in an intimate relationship with him, and let him only live with us out of pity, as well as to please us kids. I think she still loved him, but you can't have a right relationship with a demon possessed person. In September of that year he caught her in bed asleep and shot and killed her. My younger sister woke me up as I lay on the couch in the living room. She said that dad had hurt mom and that she may be dead. I jumped up and went in her room and found her dead lying on the bed. Blood was coming out of her nose, mouth, and ear and her lips were purple. My baby sister, about a year old was in bed with her. Evidently Dad had taken off her under clothes, and left her laying there with no cover. I covered her up and my sister went to the neighbor's house for help. She had turned her back on God, thinking it would make it possible to have a better relationship with dad, and look what it had gotten her. To compromise with the devil never brings good results. The devil will not be satisfied until he completely destroys you. We must always draw near to God and keep his commandments, and never compromise in the least way.

After Moms death, the children were divided up and were taken in by different relatives. Partly as a result of this, I never was very close with my younger siblings. My older brother, my younger brother and I went to live with my Great Uncle and Aunt. They were considered to be good people by this world's standards, and went to the same Pentecostal church which my mother had attended. We were required to attend that church also as part of our agreement to be allowed to live with them. I have some fond memories of them, but we were teenagers who wanted to have our own way. I remember us telling Aunt Nettie that the Sabbath was not on Sunday but on Saturday. We didn't want to go to church on Sunday, but we also didn't want to go on Saturday either. After we had gotten used to our new environment and relationship with them, we

didn't attend church like we had agreed to. I knew that their religion was not God's religion, but I didn't want any religion. I just wanted to be free to live as I pleased. That is the way that most of this world is. Instead of relying on God's Word or any form of man devised religion, I wanted to set my own standards of what I was allowed to do, or not to do. Isn't that the way that most of our society is living today? Years later I had to face the truth that my way that I had chosen to live, was what that caused all of my sorrows, pain, agony, grief, and unhappiness. But at that point I had not learned that lesson yet.

As a result of our rebellion, we were not allowed to continue to live with them. Uncle Riley felt bad about the situation, but he couldn't condone our disobedience in any of the areas where we were refusing to comply with their rules. Since I have gotten older, I have learned to have much love and respect for them, and how they loved us enough to try helping us. Of course they have been dead many years now. My older married sister allowed us to come and live with them for a while, but that didn't work out very well either. Surely you don't wonder why. We then were sent by the welfare people to live in a boys home in Tulsa, Oklahoma. A few weeks before school was out in my eleventh grade year, I ran away from the boy's home, and encountered some difficult experiences along the way, but eventually I got a job in Muskogee, Oklahoma. I lied to them and said I was eighteen years old, when I was really only seventeen. I kept that job and worked my way up from bathroom and office cleaner up through many better jobs until I was a fitter/welder when they finally closed the doors on that shop nearly 19 years later. Until I was called and converted at the age of twenty-three; I had lived according to my selfish pleasure seeking lawless way. When I was twenty years old I married, and later had two daughters and two sons by my wife. God had called me and I became converted about six years after I had started that Job. That was one of the things that I appreciate that my dad did; he taught his children to work and be diligent at it. Dad didn't have much respect for lazy people.

Before I move on to explaining the calling that God gave me, I need to mention that I lived my life the way that I thought would make me happy. I wasn't a righteous man by a long shot. I did what I pleased with little regard for the law, or

the best interest of other people. I caused much pain, grief and sorrow in the lives of other people as well as my own life. Much of this was done through trying to fulfill my own lusts for pleasure. I wasn't purposely trying to hurt people, but I was only in my pursuit of happiness, but going about it in disregard for the Creator God's righteous Commandments. I am certainly not proud of my old way, but I will mention it because I have repented of who I was, and how I was. I mention my old ways simply to illustrate how God can take an ignorant fool and correct him, and make him into one of his beloved sons. I was certainly not one of the wise or Nobel of this world, but God's word says he is not calling many of those to be the first fruits into his family and kingdom in this age. God has mostly called the foolish of this world that he may confound the Mighty, the Nobel, and wise of this world; then there is no room for any of us, whether we were fools, or wise to glory in our own self. To God belongs all real wisdom, might, nobility, and glory, and we can have it only through humility and submission to his will; and only after he has personally selected us and called us, and imparted his own Spirit into our then willingly submitted humble minds. Even our humility is a result of the goodness of God leading us to repent of our own proud, selfish, and sinful way. Our praise and glory should always be to the Great Eternal God, and not to self.

Have you ever gotten yourself into some kind of trouble, or painful experience that you called on God for help, and tried to bargain with God, promising to obey him and live by his laws if he would deliver you from your troubles and fears? Well I did, several times; and what is amazing, is that God actually did hear my prayers, and gave me deliverance! Did I keep my word and surrender to obey God? No, after my deliverance I wasn't desperate anymore, and I would try to tell myself that maybe my deliverance was just a coincidence, and that I didn't feel that I could be happy if I actually kept my word, and obeyed God. This sort of thing happened to me several times over several years. One time when I was eighteen years old, I was looking at a possible prison sentence of two years for something I had done. At first I tried to lie, my way out of trouble. Then I realized that the detectives had found evidence that would surely convict me when it goes to trial. Then I prayed to God in my desperation and tried to bargain with him to

help me out of this trouble. Astonishingly enough, God heard my prayer and delivered me; but not by my lies. God inspired me to quit lying, and tell the truth, and throw myself on the mercy of the judge and be willing to take the consequences. I did so, and the judge gave me a two year deferred sentence of probation, and restitution, along with paying monthly probation fees for two years. God would have never helped me if I had continued to lie. Through truth and honesty God did once again deliver me; but I again didn't keep my promise to God. I could not make myself believe that God was not responsible for this deliverance, and I was thinking of not calling on God anymore, because I was aware that he knew that I would just be lying to him to get out of trouble. I was tired of lying to God. I also had discovered that it was just not in me to obey God and his commandments. I didn't understand the truth about "heaven and hell" at that time, so I figured that I would probably end up going to hell. I tried to avoid thinking about it very much, but occasionally the thought would come to mind. I tried to comfort myself by telling myself that I figured that hell was going to be full of a lot of people, and if they could stand it, then surely I could also. Sometimes when the thought of hell came to mind, I would try comfort myself by thinking that I would live out most of my life doing as I pleased so that I could enjoy life, and then when I was old and near death I would start obeying God, so that I could escape hell. I look back now and laugh at myself for my foolishness. One major point that I want to make to the reader is that even the fear of "hell fire" is not enough to motivate a person to surrender your life in truth to God and to give up on your own self way and start obeying the Commandments of God; to do that is like putting yourself to death. Even the professing Christians of this world don't truly surrender to God and keep his commandments; although the fear of going to hell is one of their main motivations for professing to be Christian, and going to church services.

I have since learned that a person can't truly give up your sovereignty over your life and totally surrender to God until you are beaten down to the point that you realize that you are going to lose all anyway. It is just like the Japanese were in World War 2; they wouldn't surrender to the United States of America, even though both sides were losing thousands of lives not to mention the loss of

money and property. Even after Hiroshima had been completely destroyed with the newly developed atom bomb; they would not surrender. After the second atom bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, they finally realized that Japan would be completely destroyed if they continued in their conquest; so they finally were willing to unconditionally surrender to the United States. Man can't bring himself to unconditionally surrender to God until he honestly realizes that his own way will only destroy him and any possibility of having a good and happy life. But, even then it is real God given faith in the true gospel of The Kingdom of God that gives us the desire and motivation to be willing to turn our life over to God and try his way. When you hear what the true gospel is about, and truly believe it; then you know that; what God sets before us is a true treasure!

I was not aware of it at that time, but in reality God knew all along, that in every incident where I had promised obedience in return for deliverance from my troubles, I would not surrender to be obedient to Him. God was only allowing me to promise obedience in return for deliverance so that I would learn that he actually is real, and that he can do mighty wonders for his people, and especially so that I would learn the honest truth about myself; that I didn't have it in me to keep his commandments. God was preparing me for my calling long before I was aware of it. I did pray to God a few times after that prison deliverance but, I can't recall ever again promising to be obedient to him and his laws, by my own strength and self righteousness anymore. I determined not to promise obedience to God; for I was sure that he had learned that I would not do so, and was just lying to him. I didn't understand at the time, but God didn't have to learn that I wouldn't keep my promise to him, because he already knew that I couldn't by myself keep his commandments, no matter how well intentioned I was at the time when I promised. Only the love of God in us by the Holy Spirit can give us power to keep the Ten Commandments, and God knows that is a gift that he must supply us upon real repentance and true faith in his purpose and plan for our existence, (The true Gospel). Even that faith in the Gospel is a gift from God. Our belief or opinion is not strong enough; it takes the faith of Christ in us to believe the Gospel well enough to actually surrender our life, and will to be obedient to God, that we may have this "Pearl of great price". God was simply helping to

build, and install some faith in me by hearing and answering the prayers of a sinner whom he was planning to call.

Now back to some of my personal experiences: My wife and I were married on June 17, 1977. There were some pleasant experiences, along with some that were not so pleasant. Our first daughter was born July 4, 1978. I think I was able to learn more about real love for another person than ever before when I had my own child. I have now learned through the years of my Christian life that the emotion and feelings of love for another person, when coupled with ignorance of God's love that would fulfill the Holy Commandments is still not sufficient to cause ones behavior to be all right and good for the ones that we humanly love. The way that my wife and I lived toward each other was not good, and we had a lot of heated arguments, and attitude problems. Sin in both of us caused our marriage to become very unstable, and unhappy. We had talked of getting a divorce. Neither one of us was happy in this marriage. We were too selfish to treat one another rightly. I thought I loved my wife, and I certainly loved my daughter, but we didn't have the real godly love and character to only do what is right and good for all; in order to make our home a happy place for us, or a stable home for our daughter.

The thought of divorce troubled me, for my daughter's sake. I would not be able to take care of her if we divorced. The thought of my daughter being abused by some step father; as I had known girls that had experienced that; was enough to cause me to start looking for some real answers to how to fix our marriage problems. It lay heavy on my mind for some time, but I could realize that our problems were greater than I personally could solve. I was back in one of those jams that is discussed earlier where I needed God's help. At this point a thought kept coming into my mind that I should call on God for help. I would reject the thought and refused to call on God. That thought would come back into my mind latter and tell me; "So what if the other deliverances were just a coincidence, it always worked didn't it?" I tried to push these thoughts out of my head, and said, "No, I will not go to God and promise to obey him if he will solve our marriage problems, for God surely knows that I would only be lying to him". I continued with this reasoning for some time, and refused to go to God. I was miserable and

even thought of taking my own life, but I realized that would not solve any problems for my daughter, but only make things worse. I didn't really want to die anyway; but only to be happy and live in peace, and enjoy life.

Our problems didn't get any better, but only worse. I had meditated on the Ten Commandments and come to the conclusion that these laws are perfect, and all of our problems in the whole world would be solved if only we kept these commandments. I even discussed this with my older brother. But I also saw that it was not in my nature, nor in any human nature to keep the Ten Commandments. Human nature lusts to be free to do as they please; it even lusts against these perfect laws, and against the well being and best interest of their fellow humans, even the ones that we think we love. What could be the solution to this problem? In my ignorance I thought, "Why doesn't God just program peoples mind so that they have to be obedient to these perfect laws? I began to realize that God doesn't want human robots, or humans with an instinct but he wants us to be able to do right because we choose to. Even people wouldn't be satisfied if they were just forced to do right against their will. We like being an individual with a thinking mind to be able to help choose our own destiny. That is the way God is; he does right because of his great wisdom and because he chooses to. No one forces God to live by his way of love. I certainly didn't understand it at that time, but God wants us to become like him, as his own children. We couldn't be like God if we were just pre-programmed to have to keep Gods law. We have to learn to be obedient because we experience the results of disobedience, and then repent and willingly choose to become like God, in holy righteous character. But the power to do this is not naturally in man, and I even at that stage of my life had learned that it is not in me to keep the Commandments of God.

I didn't know it at that time but, I was to later learn that it is God's Precious gift of the Holy Spirit uniting with our human spirit in our minds that will supply the power to start being obedient to God's Commandments. This Holy Spirit of God in us will lead our human spirit to learn to willingly follow the way of resisting the wrong way, and doing the right way, so that we can develop character of strength to keep the Commandments of God, and live in a way that we show love

to God and love to our fellow humans in all of our behavior and thoughts. Real godly love leads us to care about the well being of others instead of just self interest. Real Godly love will lead us not to do hurt or harm to anyone else. Real Godly love that we receive by the Holy Spirit; is the spiritual nervous system that connects us to each other so that two or more fleshly beings are able to be united with each other in heart and mind, to be one with each other. Relationships of the mind and heart are spiritual in nature. Christ is the head and brain of this nervous system. All of the members of our physical body are united with each other, to all work together as one by the brain and the nerves. It is amazing how we are physically made in the image of God! Real love will lead us to sacrifice any selfish pleasure that would do harm to our other members, or self. The Holy Spirit will not force us against our will, but it will lead us in the way of righteous behavior. When we truly are begotten by God's Holy Spirit; if we disobey the Holy Spirit, it will be grieved, and cause us to be grieved, so that we may be led to repentance, and then God will forgive upon true repentance and we will be even more determined not to do that sin anymore. As we submit to the Holy Spirit and overcome the carnal fleshly human nature; then we will be developing Holy Character like God has. Holy Character is developed through our willing participation, so that we will not be just forced into righteous behavior; but because we willingly choose to do right. It does require our effort in similar manner as muscle strength is developed; the more you exercise against a resisting force, the stronger you become, and the easier it will become to do the right, even against the forces of wrong; but God will supply the power that we lack, if we really want it enough to struggle for it. This is how we become "overcomers". If God did it all for us, then we wouldn't be overcoming anything. To be like our Heavenly Father, we must willingly struggle against sin, but with the Power that God will equip us with. God will only give this power to those who have truly come to real sincere repentance of our own sinful nature, and have willfully decided in complete sincere honesty, to completely surrender our life over to God, to let him be our Lord and Master, and teacher from then on, for the rest of our lives. And it is not likely that you can do that until you have had a belly full of your own selfish, sinful ways, and experienced the bad results.

Now back to my personal experience: I had come to see that it was not in me to keep the Commandments of God, and I was still refusing to go to God and tell him that I would obey him if he would solve my marriage problems, for I refused to lie to God. Then one day as this weighty matter was laying on my mind, I was driving down a country road, drinking a beer in a beautiful mountainous country side near where I had done some deer hunting in the past. All of a sudden a powerful thought came into my mind; "If I were to just stop this truck, get out, look up into the heavens and talk to God in complete honesty, holding nothing back, but just talk to God, and explain my problem, he would hear me." That made so much sense to me that I did it. I don't remember the exact words, that I used, but I told God of my problem, and told him that it is not in me to obey his commandments, and I told God that he had the power to change me if he would. I asked him to do something to me, to make me able to keep his Commandments, for I could see that they were good, but it was not in my natural nature to obey them. God did hear that prayer, and he has answered it in an unexpected way.

After this a series of events began to happen which I didn't know had anything to do with God at that time. I didn't know at that time why certain events were taking place, but later I came to realize that God was behind it, so that he could bring me in contact with the true Gospel; That wonderful good news about the real purpose for our existence, the kingdom and family of God and his destiny for my life, as well as the lives of others. My wife, baby daughter and I were living in an upstairs apartment in Muskogee, Oklahoma at the time. We had to do our laundry at a laundry matt. We were using a particular laundry matt that my brother and I had started using a few years earlier when we shared an apartment with each other, before either of us was married. This laundry matt had served us well, but now suddenly it seemed that this laundry matt was becoming in bad condition. The washing machines and dryers were not working well. Many were broke down, and this place seemed to be getting trashed. We decided to find a better place to do our laundry. We went down the street a few blocks and did our laundry there once. That place seemed to be crowded and just didn't seem to suit us. The next week we went around the corner and down the street a few more blocks to another laundry matt. This one was fairly new looking, everything

worked well, and it had nice furniture to sit in while waiting. It also had nice carpet on the floor which made it appeal to me because our daughter was just learning to walk while holding on to the furniture.

My wife was doing the laundry while I was helping her watch after our daughter. I was sitting in a chair in the corner next to a table, and the table had a whole lot of Magazines on it. Among them I noticed the "Plain Truth Magazine". At this point of my life I was embarrassed to let anybody see me read a religious magazine, and especially the one which my mother had been despised for. This was the first time I had seen a Plain Truth Magazine in many years. I thought that now since I was older and could understand better; I thought I could judge for myself what that magazine was about. I was twenty three years old and had been living on my own for about six years. I was interested to find out what was in that magazine that had made my mother willing to suffer so much for it and its teachings. Because of my embarrassment I hid the magazine inside of another popular magazine. As I began to read it, I was astonished at how this magazine seemed to offer such wisdom and understanding about my personal problems and questions. It was a bible based magazine, but it answered questions that I needed to know, but I didn't even have the understanding to know how to ask. This magazine gave good wisdom and deep understanding on a wide variety of problems and situations that we find ourselves in. It was giving answers to life's most perplexing questions, and they showed that it was God's word that really had the answers. I was also learning God's real purpose for my existence! The writers gave bible scriptures to support their teachings. At first I didn't bother checking on the bible scriptures; I didn't even own a bible. The things that I was reading seemed right and wise, but I felt the need to check up on their claims to see if it truly is according to the Holy Bible. I couldn't trust in people, for I knew that a lot of conflicting teachings are being taught to people; all professing to be according to the bible. I desired to have a bible for this purpose, but was too embarrassed to go buy one.

One time later, when I was at my father- in- laws house I mentioned that I would like to have a bible. At the time I was too embarrassed to even be seen in public buying a bible. What a fool I was! My father-in-law was working at that

time on a trash pick-up route, and had found some old worn bibles in the trash dump. He got one of them and gave it to me. God was going to take care of my needs regardless of my own stupidity.

Every week I began looking forward to doing the laundry, for it was wonderful truth that I was learning from that magazine. One week I was sitting there deeply interested in what I was reading, when my wife let me know that she was finished with the laundry and was ready to go. I wasn't finished with this magazine though. I decided to steal this magazine by just hiding it in the laundry basket. I mention this to let you know that I was not just trying to make myself appear religious, or pious, but because I deeply loved the truth I was getting from this magazine, and was willing to steal it if I had to. I realize now that the people who put those magazines in the laundry matt intended for us to take them. They would have rejoiced if they had seen me take one of them. My example in this situation reminds me of Jacobs's attitude toward the "birthright blessing". Jacob had faith in his father's ability to pass on to him a blessing from God Almighty, and he was willing to do whatever it required to have it, even to steal it. His older brother Esau didn't have as much respect for it, and was willing to sell it for food when he was famished. Jacobs's attitude of faith and respect for it is one of the reasons that God determined in advance for him to receive it, instead of it going to the first born son of their father. God knows what is in our hearts nature before we commit an action. He knows our nature much better than we know our own selves. He knows the end, from the beginning. Jacob was kind of like me in that he didn't really know that God had already determined that it would go to him, so he and his mother thought they must trick his father into giving the blessing to him. In other words, in his mind he was stealing it. Stealing is wrong, but at this point in our lives God was more concerned with whether or not we really believed in it, and whether we had deep love and respect for it. We could learn not to steal and cheat latter.

After I had taken the Plain Truth Magazine home, I began to prove these teachings and the good news from my bible. I couldn't get enough knowledge about the Kingdom of God, so I ordered the magazine and also began ordering the booklets and books that were offered in them. A book by Mr. Herbert W.

Armstrong titled, “The Incredible Human Potential”, was one that I found most delightful; for it proves from the Holy Bible what the real reason for our existence is. The knowledge of the Kingdom of God and his way was like the book that is talked about in Revelation chapter 10 verses 9 and 10; it was very sweet in my mouth. This gospel offered me real hope and purpose for living! I was thrilled to realize that the Great Creator God had such an awesome reason for creating us humans in his own image. I was thrilled that God had something so special, and wonderful for me, that I could actually be begotten and later born into the Royal Family and Kingdom of God, as one of his own sons with eternal life. This was precious to me; it was in my mouth as sweet as Honey!

When I was at work, under my welding hood, all I could seem to think of was the precious knowledge that I had been learning. Not only was this knowledge offering a way out of the hellish mess that I was experiencing, but it offered me understanding from the word of God about God’s intended reason and purpose for my life’s existence. God had given me real living faith in his gospel; so that I was convinced it was real. I was embarrassed to be thought of as religious, so I tried to convince my family that this is not your ordinary religious nonsense, but this was real. They couldn’t appreciate it, and I couldn’t understand why at that time. I thought that if I could understand it, surely they should be able to also. I later had to learn that God must cause his Spirit to act on an individual’s mind to give them “ears to hear”, as Jesus talked about many times. But, to me the word of God was very sweet to my taste, as I was learning the gospel.

Next came the bitter part, after I had eaten the sweet part. I began to learn and realize that I could only have this precious gift from God if I would totally repent of breaking all of God’s Commandments, and surrender my life over to him to let him be my living Lord and Master. I would have to give up on my self reliance, and allow God to direct my every thought and action into obedience to the Ten Commandments. I would have to break my ties with most of the people that I had been associating with, for their way was the way of sinful behavior. I would have to humble myself and stop behaving as if I were capable of running my own life, and let the Holy Bible be my guide into righteous behavior. I would feel ashamed in front of my co-workers and piers for giving up on self and turning

to God. I still had a lot of vanity and pride in me that would have to go. I would have to be truthful and honest, and couldn't hide my unrighteous deeds any longer. I would have to give up a lot of bad habits. Why, this was like dying! I had committed sins against my wife and our marriage; I would have to tell the truth the next time she asked me about it. The thought of this was awful! What was I going to do? It seemed that I was damned if I did, and damned if I don't.

For the next week or so I was troubled in my mind now more than ever before. I was at a cross roads in my life, and the question was which way would I go. The mental pressure was building up on me so great that I went to God in prayer and asked him to leave me alone and just let me fit back into my old world and I would just be as before. God did to a certain degree leave me alone, and I was able to find a small amount of relief in my stressful mind; but it was all still there; just "set on the back burner."

I thought I could fit back in to my old world to find relief. One day I got in the car with some of my "in-laws and out-laws" and we went drinking, and visiting a few bars. From the time that I had gotten in that car I felt like what I later learned that Jonah must have felt like. I realized that it was a very foolish mistake to try running away from God, and his reason for my existence. I decided to "just ride this one out", and to never go drinking with them again. This whole experience was one that just "turned my stomach"; I had learned to appreciate and love right and decent values too much to fit in with this bunch. They were some of the worse characterized people that I knew. What was I thinking when I left with them?!

When we were in one bar in Vian, Oklahoma; a fight broke out between two half drunk men. One man pulled a gun on the other and was waving the gun around so that if it went off, most anybody might get shot. I had been in a bar weeks or months earlier, when a man pulled a gun on me; but that didn't cause me to fear near like this one did, because I felt this one was from God. I felt that this was God's way of dealing with me because of me allowing myself to go back into my old world. I felt that I was the real target of that gun, and God was the one in charge. I feared God greatly and went to the bathroom to pray and

confess my sins and ask for his forgiveness and deliverance. When I came out of the bathroom the fight had settled down and the gun was put up. I had told God in the bathroom that I would leave and never return if he would spare me. I had already repented and desired God to come back to me. From the beginning of this trip, I had already prayed, and planned to not ever go with them, or live that way anymore, only I would just “go ahead and ride this one out”, to save face. How vain and foolish! Now after I was back out in the bar, and the violence had been brought under control, I thought it would make me look cowardly if I suggested to these other men that I was with, that I was ready to go. So I thought I would just wait around for a while and save face. What a fool I was! I couldn't help but stare at the man who had pulled the gun, for he had on a white tee-shirt and it was covered in blood. That man stared back at me, and asked me, if I want a piece of him, since I was staring at him. I again felt that I was about to be punished for not getting out of the bar quickly. I picked up a pool stick to defend myself against him if he attacked. I told him I didn't want any trouble but was just looking at him because of his bloody shirt. Even admitting that I didn't want a fight with him was humbling to my cocky pride. He seemed to be satisfied. Fortunately I had determined from the beginning not to drink very much; and so I was sober, and able to use any good sense that I did have. Shortly thereafter the other men were ready to leave also. I was glad, because I felt that this whole event was God's way of dealing with me, and I feared God and his judgment. I felt that I probably would not have had a chance if I were involved in a fight. God has had to help me to overcome my stupid pride and vanity since then, but that lesson helped. This whole experience with these men and their talk about their perverted relationships with whores; made me sick, and I repented of ever going with them. One of these idiots even said that he agreed to let other men have his wife sexually, and didn't mind as long as they arranged it through him. If that won't turn your stomach, what would?

I think it was before the above experience that I asked God to come back to me and lead me in his way, because I realized that I had been given a calling from God; and that to turn away from God, was to willfully reject the wonderful gospel, the God designed purpose he had for my existence; God would have no more of a

real purpose for my existence! I couldn't let that happen! I wasn't very strong against temptation, so I yielded in to this drinking situation. After this drinking experience, I came to the conclusion that I would go ahead and surrender my life to God, for it wasn't no good living my way anyway. I would take a chance on Gods way, for it made more sense than any other way. I felt that if God's way became too unbearable I could always end my life. Again I was still foolish and ignorant of just how right and good and happy God's way is. God will allow persecutions and trials to help us grow better in Christ and his way, but he will not allow anything to come upon us that we will not be able to bare and overcome if we love him and his way, and our hope in his kingdom enough. God also gives us eternal Joy in knowing of his wonderful plan for our lives, which is all about the true gospel.

When I decided to surrender to God, I started being truthful. The truth did uncover some painful situations to deal with, but God gave me the strength and faith to deal with them. My wife never has been converted but for many years she did attend church services with me. Maybe in the future she will; but I will wait and let her write of her experiences, if she should ever choose to. This booklet is designed to be about my own personal experiences and conversion. Even after I had decided to surrender to God I started attending church services, but I felt the need to quit smoking before I could be baptized. I struggled with this problem off and on for about six months. When God let me know that I needed to go ahead and be baptized while I was in earnest prayer one evening, I called the minister the next morning instead of going to work, and insisted on being baptized. He seemed to try and put it off for a while longer. I insisted and went to his house. We talked for a while, and he tried to see if I would be discourage by having me read an article in a news paper where some persecutors were accusing the Church of God of being like that bunch that followed Jim Jones to their death in Guyana. I was not discouraged, for I knew that this was God's Church, and that it was God that had called me in to it. He also asked me if I had quit smoking. I was afraid he wouldn't baptize me, but I certainly knew not to lie either, even though the thought did suddenly flash across my mind; so I told him that with God's help that I hadn't had a cigarette since last night. I was baptized

on Friday the 13th of June 1980. I rejoiced greatly. In my prayer at night I was out in the back yard looking up to heaven and praising God and rejoicing; I could perceive that God and his angels were also. Incidentally that was the last cigarette that I ever smoked. God's Spirit and the realization that I have committed myself and should not look back, gave me the strength that I needed to overcome many habits and sins, throughout the rest of my life.

Since that day I have never regretted my decision to let God and Christ dwell in me, and be my Lord and Master. I have struggled to overcome my sinful human nature ever since. God has given me power to overcome my sins and weaknesses. There have been times in weakness when my feet slipped, and I sinned, but God gave me the faith, determination, and courage to get up and overcome. I have come to realize that it is that hope that we have in the gospel that gives us determination to keep going even when facing persecution, trials, and temptations. Nothing so precious has ever been given to any creature as what God offers us in his Kingdom and the good way that God beings live. We can actually be born again as Spirit born children of God at the second coming of Christ if we value it enough to let God's Spirit lead us to continue repenting of our carnal human nature, and grow in God's grace. The more we put to death the carnal self nature, the more we are given the nature of God by his precious gift. We will continue this growth in the mind and character of Christ our Lord until we will be ready to be born as God's sons at his coming. Either by a resurrection from the dead, or by instantly being changed, we that prove ourselves faithful will be born into that immortal family and Kingdom of God. Can you think of anything more awesome and wonderful than that?

If you can truly believe this gospel that Christ taught, then you should be motivated to not let anything stand in your path that would hinder you from being able to obtain this wonderful life that he freely offers to us. Just as Jacob wrestled with the angle of the Lord all night, and refused to give up, and finally prevailed; so also will we wrestle to overcome any and all of our weaknesses until we also prevail if we have enough faith in the true gospel. As I mentioned earlier in this booklet; fear of going to hell, or going into "Great Tribulation", or any other fear will not motivate people to truly surrender their lives to Christ and our Father

in heaven; but real living faith in the true gospel will. That is why the primary message that Christ commissioned to the Apostles is; to Preach and publish the true gospel and repentance of one's sins, which is the transgression of God's Commandments. As I pointed out in my life story; we can't have this precious gift of God, no matter how much you may think you want it, unless you repent and start living the way that God and his family must and does live. If God were to allow us to have eternal life while we choose to live in sin, we would bring indescribable suffering, pain and grief on ourselves as well as others. It would be as bad as, or worse than what men preach about "hell". Sin doesn't stay the same; it grows and gets continually worse; even as this world we live in has proved in 6000 years of history. When we were only three or four years old, our sins were minor compared with what we became like as we grew older. It is very merciful for God to withhold eternal life from sinners who will not be corrected by God. Salvation is a free gift; you can't earn it, but unless you are willing to be corrected, God will not give it to you. For this reason God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, and would not let them have access to the symbolic tree of life after they had made the choice of disobeying God, and deciding for their self what they thought was right for their selves. That is the way that I lived in my unconverted days. That is the way that the whole world is living. God helped me learn, that living that way is the cause of all of our sorrows, grief, pain, suffering, strife, and division.

I will close this writing here even though there are volumes of truth that could be added in here. Study your bibles and find these precious truths that I tell you about in God's written word; and study as much of the literature of Herbert W. Armstrong as you can find. Study my literature. Soon God will get the attention of thousands of people all over the world, during the great tribulation. Don't wait to learn the truth; if you can believe it, go for it now. Christ will come sooner than you think, and we whom God has called and converted to his way of living will receive our great reward in his kingdom. Friends and brethren don't let any sin, anything, or anybody stand between you and Christ. My own Mother's life is a good example of, what letting anything stand between you and Christ will do to you. Jesus compared our Christian calling into the kingdom of God to be like

discovering a hidden treasure in a field; and desiring it so much that we go and sell all that we have so that we can buy that field, that we may have that treasure. What we must “sell” or get rid of, that we may have eternal life as a Spirit born son of God in the family and kingdom of God, is our old life of sinful nature. We must surrender all, and totally put our trust in God; that we may have this treasure; a new and eternal life in Christ Jesus that is Holy and righteous. As the Apostle Paul said, we must die daily; and increase in our new life by letting Christ live in us. We should be a temple that Christ and God our Father can and does live in. We should represent God and Christ in our fleshly bodies. If we truly believe this gospel, then we should be motivated to do so. Then when the sinners of this world are mourning and calling for the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the face of Christ at his coming we shall be rejoicing with unspeakable joy, as we rise to meet with the glorified Christ in the clouds of heaven. God speed that day! And God help us be ready! As Jesus said WATCH! To watch means to stay awake spiritually to avoid temptations and sin. Stand guard against allowing any sin in our lives. Guard your mind against temptation and sin and stay in close contact with God in sincere prayer, and giving thanks and praise to God with understanding. Just watching world conditions as they relate to prophecy is not enough; for many sinners know some bible prophecy, and know that we are near the end of this world; but they aren’t clothed in clean and white garments. Sin is so deceitful that it is hard for a person to see it, unless they are alert. Therefore look inside your heart and mind and WATCH!

Gary Stowers