

# Testimony

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**Conversion & Call.** Into early adulthood I struggled with an overwhelming, crippling conviction of sin, until, by God's grace, I understood and trusted that Jesus was crucified for me, raised for my justification, and that he is willing to save *whoever* will call upon his name. Initially, I tried to put off the call to preach, having already invested so much in academic life. In 2008, however, several trials converged that forced me to reconsider. Sudden, almost chronic, under-employment, accompanied by the discovery in my wife of a rare brain tumor (with attendant surgeries, radiation, and two-year recovery), left me without any desire to continue as I was. I came to realize how small and insignificant my personal goals were, and I found the idea of returning to the *status quo* utterly revolting. Out of this profound experience (including my wife's healing), I surrendered in 2010 to what I can only describe as a *setting-apart* to proclaim the gospel.

**A Redemptive Time in My Journey in Christ.** Transforming my identity to "pastor" required the petri dish of God's discipline. When in 2008 I lost my university teaching position, the only job I could find in town was in a BBQ restaurant. I worked at this filthy place with people I thought were beneath me. I was angry at being broke, and was terrified for my wife's health. In time, the Lord opened my eyes to the desperate needs of the people with whom I was working—especially eye-opening was that, there in the heart of the Bible Belt, was this incredibly thread-bare understanding of the gospel among them all. *How had I not seen all that before?* By the time I left that restaurant (2010), I had become a pastor to these beautiful people, and I miss them even now.

**Favorite Bible Passage & Why.** Romans 3:21-26. On the cross, Jesus is revealed to the world as God's distinct "One." Whereas, we are constitutionally short-fallen because of sin, unable to stand before God with our own righteousness, Jesus does stand. He alone has been put forward ["demonstrated"] as God's righteousness, lifted up on the cross, accepted & glorified by the Father, and deserving of all love, honor, devotion—and most of all, *faith*. Only Jesus is salvation. All other means are blasphemous imitations of the gospel & the worst kinds of boastful self-delusion.

**Basic Personality Strengths & Weaknesses.** My strengths are in the areas of planning & organizing. Under these, some evident ministry strong points include: valuing the welfare of people, strategy, innovation, developing vision, accuracy & detail, & data analysis. Other behavioral characteristics are soft-heartedness, reflectiveness, & optimism, as well as stubbornness, eccentricity, & cynicism. [Results as indicated in the Birkman Personality Assessment Tool (assessed 2011).]

**Related Personal Skills.** I am a classically-trained musician as well as a songwriter, hymnist, & sometime poet. Writing songs and hymns brings me particular joy, and is an effective tool for implanting God's word into the mind.

## Three Accomplishments & How They Have Shaped Me.

**My marriage.** Our marriage has been hard for many reasons, not the least of which was my early immaturity and Holly's ongoing battle with cystic fibrosis. The last thing I thought I would become (or wanted to become) is a care-giver. But I have learned through caring for her that life is not about me. 16 years of marriage may not sound very long to some, but we are very, very happy. **My education.** I suppose it's not just that I reached candidacy in the PhD, but that there was so much personal sacrifice to get to that level. Learning is not difficult for me, but making time for family, church & research was a real accomplishment. I literally had to learn to multi-task while

thinking at the highest levels of my field. If I had it to do again, I would have tried to finish much, much sooner. **My tenacity in Suffering.** Clinical depression is misunderstood by most people, even by many who suffer by it. I don't know why God ordained this particular burden for me—I prayed earnestly for years that he would take it away, but I have stopped asking. I *can* testify that God has used it to humble me and to help me better empathize with those who suffer.

## Three Setbacks & What I Learned from Them.

**Leaving college at 19.** In my freshman year at college (1985), I went, in one semester's time, from having a spot on the college basketball team, being popular, and having my dream-girl at my side, to getting a pre-paid trip home, alone. There were no criminal charges or anything. But I had let my GPA go into the tank, had started some fights, and started bingeing on alcohol to cope with sudden depression. Finally, when I tried to start a fist-fight with one of my coaches, I was asked in the politest terms "never to show your face on this court again!" I'm embarrassed by all that now, and if I had it to do again, I would have gotten some help for the depression & put my head into some books. But I have learned that God makes great things out of the greatest humiliations. **Walking away from a friendship.** This was many years ago, and I regret it terribly. I didn't have the honesty then to say to that person, "You are smothering me, and you need to back off some." Instead, I told him to take a hike, and that was that. Obviously he was devastated and couldn't understand. It was a heartless, *cold* thing to do on my part. If I had known then what I know now about my own depravity & selfishness... **My father never hearing me preach.** My father and I loved each other very much but often didn't understand one another; we certainly did not see eye to eye on my vocation. He wanted me to stay in academia for the sake of financial stability; but I knew God was calling me to full-time ministry. Unfortunately, Dad went to heaven before he got to hear me preach. Every now and then, I go out to his grave and just wait for the Lord there with him; maybe I'll take a sermon out there someday.

**Long-term Goals for My Life.** There are three, 1) to complete the mission of raising my daughter to be a woman who loves God with all her heart, soul, mind, & strength; 2) until the day I die to love, honor, & fight for the wife God has given me; and 3) to humbly develop an ever-higher proficiency in communicating God's word.

**How I Do Leisure.** My usual leisure activities include reading anything I can get my hands on, fishing, shooting guns, watching action movies, and hanging out at Starbucks.