

Mason's Testimony: God Saves, The Sinner's Prayer Only Hurts People

Mason Vann | illbehonest.com

Psalms 105:5 says, "Remember His wonders which He has done." So it is a good thing for us to remember and to think about what God has done in our life. I grew up in a home where my family took me to church basically every time the doors were open. So the reality of God was in my life from infancy upward. There was never really a time in my life where my parents didn't make me go to church. Through that time, there was conviction of sin. There were times especially when revivalists would come through, and I would have an emotional experience. And I would realize the reality of hell. Realize where I was at. So I would walk an aisle, pray a prayer, and make a decision that never seemed to really last.

People make jokes about this, but I actually believe that at my house in Alabama, there are at least two Bibles where I have, "I, Mason Vann, was saved..." and the date. And signed it, so I wouldn't doubt it. So that's a reality. That's not just a joke that people make. I have at least a couple of those. So that's kind of the realm in which I grew up.

And I can remember the final time in that period of my life that I came under conviction. A revivalist had come through, and made a very emotional appeal, and yet God was dealing with me on a certain level. So that thought came over me that I am not right with God. And I need to be right with God. And that every profession that I'd made up until now was not real and I needed something that was real. So I went forward once again. And this time, I decided, this time is going to be real. I am really going to make an effort this time to be a Christian. So, I think I printed it again in the back of my Bible that I was saved on this date.

So I started diligently trying to read my Bible. One of the times before that, I had come under such intense conviction of sin, that I went downstairs in the basement and went into a corner and I sobbed for hours. As a matter of fact, my father came down there and asked me what was going on. So that's kind of the reality of the level of conviction that I was under. But this time, it was going to be different. So I set to reading the Bible and to praying the best that I could. Every night I would light a candle, turn off all my lights, and light a candle by my bed, so that I would read my Bible by candlelight, because that felt more spiritual.

That's a funny thing, but it really helps us to realize what's going on with a lot of things like Catholicism, and people that use lighting and soft music and things like that. My life was propped up on things like reading my Bible by candlelight. It gave me the feeling that this was real. But as soon as the candle went out, there went my spiritual life also.

Well, this began to fade. And this is about 12 or 13, and I was very much into baseball, sports and athletics and things like that. My father is actually in the Hall of Fame in a college in Alabama. So he was really pushing sports and things. So I was heavily involved in these things, and began to run around in these circles with people that were into sports. And we as a crowd began to move away from all that we had grown up under. And we began to get into things that we knew that we should not be doing. And so, I kind of, in my mind, walked away from the

whole church scene. Even though I was still going to church, and things like that, I knew that I wasn't real. But I kept going to church because I was trying to ease my conscience.

Well, about 14 and a half, this conviction came back. And it came back this time with such reality, such an unshakeable hold on my life, I could not do anything to get away from it. During that time, most people's perception of me was that I was a tough guy. I was a guy who had very little emotion. I had a very quick temper. So most people thought of me, probably, as a person who would never show any kind of sorrow or remorse or anything like that. Well, little did they know, that every night when I came home from their parties, and I came home from hanging out with them, that I would cry my eyes out for about one to two hours each night, under the reality that I am not right with God. My profession of faith is worthless. Those Bibles with the date in them are worthless. Despite everything else around me, I am not right with Christ. And if I go tonight, I will die under the wrath of God.

So, every night it was basically the same routine. I would cry myself to sleep. And right before I would go to sleep, I would pray the sinner's prayer again, because that's what I was taught growing up. That's how you became a Christian. You prayed the sinner's prayer. And so this continued for about two years that I was in this state of reality and such intense conviction. Well, my temper ended up getting me in trouble. And without going into too many gory details, I got into a fight with a guy from a neighboring city. All my friends were supposed to come to this fight, and I was clearly smaller than this guy, and so the plan was that I basically start the fight and then you guys come and help me.

Well, that is not how the plan worked out. God was pursuing me. And God providentially, looking back now, as a Christian I can see, God was closing in on me at this point in my life. And so, needless to say, I lose this fight. And I am running for my life. Literally, I am running for my life. And for two weeks, I'm hiding out from everyone. And all these people are looking for me.

Well, providentially, the youth group at the church I went to was going to South Carolina. The year before, I had went with my friend to South Carolina. We met some people up there. So I thought, I have to get out of town. So what I'll do, I'll catch the bus up there. And my friend and I will hang out with these people, and when the youth group comes back, we'll catch a ride on the way back. So that was the plan. So you should have seen the shock on the youth group's face, when I, the pagan of the school, show up on the church bus, going to South Carolina. I mean, these people were dumbfounded. A dear brother at the time, who had some discernment, he began to pray for me. He was the youth leader at that time. And he began to pray for me. He knew that I was just in a world of mess.

So, we go up there. And throughout this time, and especially through those two weeks, I had been able to, so much of my life, drown out the voice of God. See, I hated when I had to lay my head down on a pillow. Because then the voice of God would come rushing back. So if I wasn't listening to music, I was at a party. If I wasn't at a party, I was talking to a friend. If I wasn't talking to a friend, I was doing something. I would do absolutely anything to avoid silence. Because when silence came, the voice of God came back rushing into my life saying, "You're not right with God." "You know you need to be converted." So, this whole thing with this fight, and my support system for drowning out the voice of God with my friends, all came crumbling down, and here I find myself on a trip to South Carolina.

During that time in South Carolina, I don't really have any recollection that I was making another decision that I was going to follow Christ. I did not go up there with the mindset that I'm really in trouble and I need to make another decision. I had already seen enough at that point to know that it was going to take more than me just praying another prayer for something real to happen. And so, the first two days were pretty normal. I don't even really remember much about them. About the only thing that I remember is the very last night before we were to leave and go back the next day. It seemed to be a really emotional time. And I can remember a little bit that day of thinking about some of these things about I'm not right with God, I need to be right with God, but I feel absolutely powerless.

And so during that night, like I said, typical emotional time, everyone bowed their heads. So, out of courtesy, I bowed my head. And I do remember thinking when I bowed my head, I need something real. I can't explain what happened. But somewhere between the time of bowing my head and when I looked up and opened my eyes again, the only thing that I could see was the glory of God in the face of Christ. All of a sudden, the wilderness had become a pool. And the love of God came rushing into my life. It overwhelmed me. I could not be helped. The youth leaders didn't know what to do. Because I was crying my eyes out. I had such an overwhelming sense that I'm free. I am free. This whole thing. This whole burden of sin. Two years of the wrath of God closing down on me. All of my sins are gone. And Christ is no longer this religious figure that's way back there 2,000 years ago carrying lambs around on His shoulders. All of a sudden, He is the risen Son of God, and I love Him. And I want to follow Him. I don't ever want to sin again. I don't ever want to do anything that would offend love that is this precious.

And so that was that night. They wisely sent me back to my room and said you need to pray. I misunderstood that. Because I had grown up under the mentality that you had to pray and ask Christ into your heart. And so I go back to my hotel room once I can kind of compose myself some. And I began to try to pray the sinner's prayer. But I was much like the prodigal son when he returned to his father. You know, on the way returning back, he had rehearsed this speech that he was going to give to his father when he got back. And basically what happens is, when the prodigal actually shows up, the father cuts him off halfway through the speech and says I don't want to hear all that you can do for me. I'm glad you're home. And so that's the way I felt like praying the sinner's prayer. It's like I'm asking Christ to come into my heart and He's saying, You don't have to... I'm here. I'm here. I'm a living reality. Your sins are done. Your sins are done. And so there was joy unspeakable.

And my life was totally different. I made a phone call. I believe it was that night or the next day, to all the people that I'd gotten into a fight with and said I don't care what you do when I get back home, I have become a Christian now. Which, what do you say to that? But I want to say something about this whole thing because there was joy unspeakable. And there was so much happiness. but I went through several months, maybe even a couple of years of darkness in a way over this whole issue of the sinner's prayer. You can hear guys preaching against that, and you can think, maybe you're overemphasizing this a little too much. Maybe you need to back off a little bit. Well, that hurts people. Bad doctrine hurts people. And it hurt me. And here's the way that it hurt me. For months and like I said, maybe even a couple of years after I was saved, I left almost every meeting I was in about halfway through the meeting and went to a

Sunday school room and would pray the sinner's prayer. Because I thought, Lord, You're so real to me, but I cannot be saved because I was taught that the way that you become a Christian is you pray, ask Christ into your heart, and then God saves you. Well, none of that happened. All that happened to me was I bowed my head and at some point God shown the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ into my heart, and I was converted. And that's basically the way that it happened.

And so, like I said, this went on for a couple of years. And what brought me out of all of that, was someone gave me a tape by Paul Washer. And this was back before the days when everyone knew Paul Washer. And it was a tape of Paul preaching on Hosea 4:6 where it says, "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge." And somewhere in the midst of that sermon, he mentioned Jeremiah 17:9 where it says, "The heart is desperately wicked and deceitful above all things, who can know it?" God made that verse real. God brought that home to me. I didn't hear anything else he said after that. Because I realized, God began to unpack that verse in my life. And He began showing me, if my heart was desperately wicked and deceitful above all things, and myself - I can't even know it? There was no way I was going to save myself. So all of a sudden, these verses started becoming real. Matthew 1:21, "You shall call His name Jesus, and He will save His people from their sins." I realized what happened that night. I didn't save myself. God saved me. We're not saved by deeds done in righteousness, but by His mercy. And so what happened that night, is that God in His mercy opened my eyes to see the preciousness of Christ. And that vision so raptured my heart that I wanted to follow Christ all of the days of my life. And so that's what the Lord has done for me. Amen.