

Peace and Purpose Are Found in Christ

Chuck Vuolo's Testimony

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So let me briefly just tell you my story. I was raised in northern New Jersey in a family that was nominally Roman Catholic. My father was raised Italian Catholic and for him it was enough that we made our first holy communion at about age six and after that we were on our own, to go to church. By my mid-teens I found myself asking some of the basic questions about life. Why am I here? Where am I going? What's going to happen to me when I die?

And so I began going on my own to the Roman Catholic Church about a mile away across our little mile square town. Walking to church in my mid-teens asking those questions. But I remember returning week after week as empty-headed as I went. The Catholic Church was a lot of ceremony. It was sit, stand, kneel, sit, stand, kneel. Some monotone dull prayers. Some reading of Scripture, which seemed to be a faraway world. And rather ironically the mass would end by the priest saying, "The mass is ended go in peace." And the congregational response was, "Thanks be to God." And the way they all peeled, out took off for the parking lot, I interpreted that to mean that the mass had ended, go in peace, thank God, it is over. I've done my 45 minutes of religion for the week and I'm done. And that's how people were viewing it. And that's how I was viewing it. No answers.

But in the in the kind Providence of God in those mid teen years I met a couple of young men at a pond where my friend and I used to ice skate and play ice hockey. And these guys were about my age. I love to fish. And these guys were not only fishermen they were fishermen, hunters, and trappers in suburban North Jersey. It was like these guys should have been born in another century. But they became my friends and we began fishing together and through them I was exposed to a Baptist youth group. And even though I'm sure it was a bunch of immature kids many of them even not even converted, but there was something real and genuine about their faith, that I had never seen before. When they prayed a simple prayer over a meal it was as though God were a real person and that they knew him. And that was different from what I had known in the Roman Catholic Church and I was intrigued by their lives. They had something that I didn't have and I wanted. Now they were friendly toward me. But somehow I had the sense that I'm on the outside looking into something that I'm not a part of. And I knew it was all about Jesus.

But God didn't put it together for me right away. I went off to college at a young age of 16. My freshman year went okay. I was majoring in Psychology simply because to me people were more interesting than things. And so let me major in psychology. I had no direction for my life. After that first year we had taken a vacation up to Canada. I met a young French Canadian girl that I had a an interest in. An infatuation with, and you know I went up and visited her on my motorcycle. And then returned to college in Maryland for my second year of college. And that year was the worst year of my life. I began to spiral downward in a deeper and deeper depression. One reason was that relationship with this girl in Canada wasn't working out, but more than that I had no purpose and meaning to my life. Francis Schaeffer once described my life as you take a woman's bead necklace and

you cut the string and all the beads roll around with no string to tie them together. And that was my life. If you looked at each bead. I had loving parents though not Christian. You know I was a good student. I played sports. I had friends. I joined a fraternity. My life was together from an external standpoint but there was no string to tie my life together. Why was I here? What was the purpose of my life? What was going to happen when I died?

And so I began to spiral downward in depression. I had been on the wrestling team but that year I had no motivation, no drive, and I started, but then I quit the wrestling team. At second semester I actually failed a course. I had never come close to failing of course. I didn't even go to the final exam and that was a sign that I was sinking into a deep depression. It was the hippie era. This was 1970. And you know people were running to California and I wasn't a hippie, I wasn't into drugs, but I was so despairing that I was planning at the end of that year, after the first week of May, to jump on my motorcycle, and run to California. Which was unusual for me. I never did daring things. I didn't want to hurt my parents I loved them. But I was so depressed, I just wanted to run away.

May 1, 1970 was a momentous day in my life. I was going down to the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland to study for a final exam. I had a fraternity brother on the back of my motorcycle. We were gonna go to the beach just catch some rays and study. There was a gully and I asked him to hop off and I'd meet him on the other side. And when I kick-started the engine flames shot out of the carburetors, for some unknown reason, and within seconds ignited that foam rubber seat perhaps I could have put it out if I thought quickly. But I didn't. I dropped the motorcycle and we watched it go up in flames. Until we were bold enough to throw sand and dirt on it and put the fire out by that time the the motorcycle was ruined, it was a massive melted rubber and plastic. Some friends came out from campus with a pickup truck, and towed it and us back to campus. And I remember wheeling my motorcycle down to one of those do-it-yourself car washes to begin to clean it off and take it apart. It was so long ago it only cost 25 cents. But I remember thinking maybe the God of my Christian friends in New Jersey has the answer for me. And all I can tell you men, is at some time in that next week Jesus Christ came into my life. I never remember making a prayer but I'd pieced together enough of the Gospel. I knew it was all about Jesus. And all I can say is God must have regenerated me given me faith and in that first week I was changed forever. The depression lifted the peace of God descended upon my life. I returned home New Jersey a new creation in Christ and a half years ago.

And three of the things that marked the change in my life were these.

Number one I had the assurance that my sins were forgiven. I can remember driving down the New Jersey Turnpike on my motorcycle, you know with tractor trailers, and making vows to God, and I mean remember thinking after I got my motorcycle rebuilt, "I still don't want to wipe out on a patch of oil, but if I do I'm going to heaven." I knew my sins were forgiven.

Then God gave me a hunger for the Bible. We didn't have a Bible in our home, we searched high and low, and I found my first Bible in the glove compartment of a Mayflower moving truck that I used to drive during the summers, I still have that Bible. A King James Bible with John chapter five missing, it was a couple years before I got to read John chapter five, because for some reason that was ripped out. But a hunger for the Bible and if you look at that first Bible it's highlighted and underlined, asterisks, and stars and notes it was just the hunger of that newborn babe for the milk of the word.

And the third change was I became a witness for Jesus. I was never a bold in-your-face kind of person about anything. I had no strong opinions about any anything. I had no message for anybody. But the realization that Jesus Christ was the key to everybody's eternity turned even a somewhat quiet kind of person into a person who carried around a satchel of tracts wherever I went, and witnessed to everybody I could find. And those were the things that marked the evidence that God had given me new life.

If anybody is here and you're in that same position, life may be good, life may be rough, but there's no purpose, no sense of meaning. "Why am I here?" "Is there a God, who is he?" "Where am I going when I die?"

My prayer is that you would call upon Jesus Christ. The one who changed my life forty seven and a half year ago. And that you would know the same experience of having His peace that He gave to me. I cannot account for my life except for the fact that Jesus is a risen and living Savior. None of this pulling yourself up by your religious bootstraps. I had no strength to pull myself up by any bootstraps. Jesus came and visited me in Middle Hall on the campus of Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland 47 1/2 years ago and changed me forever. If you're not a Christian He can change and save you, call upon Him.