

Saving Grace— A Personal Experience

By: Sally Hohnberger

Saving grace is **God reaching out to me**, to offer me a better way of life. A life of true happiness, a life of being led of God. Not a life of ease, pleasure loving activities only, and an avoidance of all trials and perplexities but a life of walking with God and finding happiness and a peace that passes understanding amidst even trials. Will I respond to Him?

When I was a child my parents wanted me **to know about God** and they took me to church to learn about Him. Indeed I learned some, but was not taught how to bring God into my personal, daily life, nor taught that I needed to consult and commune with God. I just learned about Him, that was all my loving parents knew and they gave what they had. As a toddler, trials, perplexities and sorrows came into my life for a time. My father became severely ill with cancer of the throat, which took years before he was again a part of our home. My father came home from the hospital one day and my mother told me this was my father. I knew him not and hid behind my mother's skirt. God uses trials and perplexities to teach us as His children about the need for surrender and obedience, then shows us his love. Parents stand in the place of God. Trusting and obeying my mother I found this man very kind and loving and came to know him as my father. He loved me so very much. It took a surrender of my will to experience my father's love, didn't it? So too with my heavenly Father.

Then in my childhood the cancer returned and my father was again gone for a long time. My mother had to work full time to support our family of five children. Another man came into our home and life, and worked ill and havoc for many years. A divorce from my real father ensued with heartache and confusion, then physical battles came into our home, mental and emotional upheaval and fear became our daily life all as a result of this other man. Gun shot wounds, and hospitalizations tore at everyone's heart strings. Anger, fear, resentments all had to be sorted out. Is there a God anywhere?

It was these trials that awakened my need of God. My family knew about God but they were independent of God leading them, they knew not a personal God at that time. God reached out to me amidst these trials and sorrows as I am sure He did everyone in my family. I'm so grateful someone had been praying for me and gave God permission to work in my life in a fuller way for I seldom prayed. During a most trying situation, this step father in our home, was threatening suicide in the bedroom, the police where there in the living room, and we were told they could do nothing until this man harmed himself or someone else. Unfairness, resentment for all this heartache in our home entered my thoughts and feelings.

Then it was that God made Himself known in my conscience. Sally what about "that man," shouldn't you have compassion for the condition he is in? I cooperated and thought the thoughts God was bringing into my mind and I lost sight of how this was misery to me and my family. This compassion and pity was from above, it was not my natural inclination to think this way. As I cooperated in thinking these thoughts, I was no longer just with Jesus at my side but Jesus was working in me, His thoughts, feelings and attitudes, and they became real. The amazing thing is what happened to me next. A peace that passes understanding, a love that ought not be, filled my heart, mind and even my emotions. This my friends was the beginning experience for me of saving grace freeing me from my selfish thoughts and emotions. The Holy Spirit was wooing me to trust Him more, even in this unstable environment. Would I continue to cooperate?

As yet I didn't understand salvation, grace, God, nor the need for **my cooperation to reach back to God** as he reaches out to us, but I cooperated in heart and life in this instance, and God blessed me. There is a process we go through in coming to know God and experiencing divine power changing us even though, we do not understand all the intricacies

of this process as yet. God was calling me to a deeper relationship with Him and where I cooperated I was blessed, where I didn't cooperate for what ever reason, I was miserable sooner or later. My relationship with God was beginning, but it was an on again, off again experience according to my awareness of need. God wanted me 100% but I only cooperated some of the time. It was years before I understood this and came closer to God. I began to occasionally pray for this man, home was still miserable, and unstable. Finally, through various circumstance, this man left our home, and another divorce was our lot. There are consequences for not following God's way of life, isn't there? If only my mother had known a personal relationship with God that she could have confidently had union and communion with Jesus, to seek advice for her life and surrendered to do His will, we could all have been spared these heartaches and trials. If only I had prayed and cooperated more. But alas we did not.

My mother did the best she could under her circumstances and with her understanding. Years later God made me aware of some of these resentments from my childhood that I still held in my heart. God showed me my wrong feelings so He could free me from, and change those wrong thoughts and feelings. It required me to cooperate as He led me to forgive and forget by grace. As I chose to let the feelings go, God took them away. Isn't God good to offer to save us from these hurtful thoughts and feelings? People tell me there is no hope for a child in a divorce situation to be free from revenge or bitterness. I say there is hope for everyone who reaches out to God and cooperates as He leads you, then God can and will transform them on the inside, I know! I've experienced it!

During the divorce of this step father, as a young teen, I drove my mother to the court proceedings and unknown to me I was asked to take the witness stand. When asked to say what this man did to us, fear gripped me. I was unprepared and immature for knowing what to do. If I tell the truth my mother could be shot again by this unstable, irrational, violent man. If I don't tell the truth the court could deny the divorce request and then what? My mind was confused and emotional. The predominate thought was, what should I do? I want to do what is right for my mother, this man and my family. God answered the call of my heart to do right. He used the judge, who was above me in that tall desk, in that authoritative robe, and leaning over towards me he said in the kindest voice, the encouraging words, "Just tell the truth. Don't be afraid. Do the best you can." That was all I needed and the all knowing God knew my needs. Again I **responded back to the will of God**. My heart knew, against my reasoning, that to tell the truth was what I needed to do. It was courage given of God to enable me to speak the truth in this court room setting. God blessed and circumstances led this man far from our home and state. God will help us when we reach out to Him, won't He? But we have a part to cooperate. When we cooperate and do the right, trusting in God, the blessings come in God's timing. Even if it is bringing us out of consequences due to transgression of His way and will? Yes, He wants to be our God and us to be His people. Isn't this saving grace? God wants to offer us a different way of life. He wants to be a God to

lead His people in the paths of right doing, and enable them to do it by His divine power.

Our life found peace at last. We went to church again but alas soon fell back to our old ways of sleeping in and using God's time for personal pleasure. God gets crowded out so easily, even after He does great things for us, how sad. We need to daily reach out, connect and be consciously led of God moment by moment don't we? Without Him we can do nothing.

What trials and perplexities are making your life miserable? Have you reached out to God, taken time to know His will for your life and sought to do the right as it is in Jesus' strength? He will love to commune with you and show you a way of escape and draw you into a closer union with Him. Obedience is the result of Christ dwelling within and directing us. Doing God's will in sunshine or rain gives peace and true happiness. Salvation is sweet after we surrender our will to His. Open independence, indecision or partial obedience, not letting self go, is why many find the Christian life so hard. Try God and see for yourself. He longs to draw you unto Himself and show His love to you even more than my earthly father did to me as a toddler. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

In my later teens God again markedly directed my path. He led me to be kind at last to some young fellow. You see, I had strong prejudices against boys and men. One day God spoke to my conscience saying, not all boys are like the ones you've known. You need to be kind to one someday was the suggestion as I walked into my next class. Well why not now, was the next thought. I responded to this thought and said "hi" to a nice young blonde haired, green eyed boy who sat right in front of me in class. This was contrary to my character at this time. This cooperation with God changed my life. Jim and I were both nominal Christians at this time. We began dating in a very proper manner, got to know each other, then our life's path separated for a year. I got to know other young men, but was unsatisfied, none were the gentleman he was. Jim and I began dating again and then went away to different colleges about 400 miles apart. Through obedience to God's prompting to my conscience I met the one I was to marry someday and together in later years we would seek God in a deeper way. Five years later we married. The next five years we chose to get our life financially established, get a home and establish our life with each other before starting a family.

Most people thought we were amiss not to start a family right away, but we were following God's plan for our lives. We didn't fully understand that at the time, but years later we saw the wisdom of God directing us in this way. Then came our first son, Matthew. Oh what a delight to have our boy. Many trials began in this little ones life. His liver was overtaxed, he was jaundiced, he came home at last at 5 pounds. I'm so thankful we were studying prayer at the time of his birth! God likes us to be practical with the knowledge we are learning doesn't He? Matthew also had severely crooked, turned in feet. We had a brace for his feet that the doctor prescribed to correct this problem in 3-5 years.

Trials are a call to prayer you know. Well I hadn't read that as yet but

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this situation brought me to my knees, asking God to heal my son's feet, if it was His will of course. We had worked with the brace about 2 weeks at this time. I really didn't expect God to answer this prayer, but friends, He did! God allowed my heart to reach out to Him often to exercise the muscle of prayer, perseverance, and trusting Him to work out what was best for us. God also required me to bring my life into harmony with His revealed will to eliminate the hindrances, to His blessings. Sin and selfishness separated me from God and when these are present, they hinder God's working in my life. So I needed to repent from serving self and give fruits unto repentance like the Bible says. I did all I understood at the time. I wanted to be united with Christ and no longer separated and independent of Him.

One day after a couple weeks of prayer and repentance, I put Matthew into the little swing and in a short time noticed his feet hung straight. I couldn't believe it! It couldn't be or could it? It was! Excitedly I called Jim and told him what God had done for us. Jim couldn't believe it until he came home and saw it for himself. God does answer prayer. Miracles happen today as in the days of the disciples. God continued to call us to trust Him more.

Returning to the doctor was another trial of our faith. He said he was not healed! One touch of his hand to my son's knees and feet and they returned to their deformed position. Our hearts were crushed, and confused as we returned home. Jim and I sought our heavenly Father to help us sort this out. We got a second doctor's opinion, then made the decision on what we saw. His feet were straight now, He was healed, we will trust God, and we threw away the brace. Over the years I have thrilled to see Matthew skip, run, jump and become very athletic and nimble on his feet for I knew what God had saved him from. What gratitude filled my heart! Why do we as a people pray and cooperate with God so little?

God wants to save us from far more than just physical impairments though. He wants to save us from the bondage of, and servitude to, sin and selfishness. Often he used physical healing to teach us how He can heal us spiritually and emotionally too! Have you asked God to heal your deformities? Will you cooperate in all you know He wants you to do?

What are these miracles for? To draw us to God, to show His love towards us in order to motivate us to trust Him more, to believe we can walk in God's ways no matter where we are coming from, and to help us to see God is real and lives today. This miracle accomplished just that in our lives. It drew us closer to God that He might deliver us more fully. Do you see His **salvation** in action, through saving grace? God wants to free us from the consequences and curse of sin. My God is able to deliver all who come to Him. Our heavenly Father wants us all to come to Him with all our trials, perplexities, and deformities, to seek healing according to His will. Years later I learned that God does not always free us or heal us from disease or deformity. If this is the case, we found He always gives the strength and wisdom to keep our hearts and minds in the trial, disease or deformity. Both can be a blessing. The real and lasting blessing is to have Jesus indwelling and giving the inward peace and contentment for those things which we cannot or God chooses not

to change.

Jim and I came to more Bible truths and were desirous of being a more dependent Christian, and a closer follower of Jesus in our 30's. We had come to understand that God's ways and will often were contrary to our life style and ways of life. We had come to see that following Christ would cost us, for many changes were necessary to come into harmony with His Word. God asked us to change our language, our life style, to cease partying, to change our day of worship, make some diet changes, then entering into a prayer life. Each proved to be a blessing as well as a discipline. We knew we needed a Saviour from sin as well, but as yet did not understand "self" as the true enemy of our soul, and self needed to be turned away from entirely as it is in Jesus. We felt the need to learn how to overcome getting irritated and giving way to anger to each other and have mastery over self in the weak areas of our life. God wants to

save us from all "self." That self may be habits learned in the world, seen in our thinking, our speaking, our eating, our dress or our deeds. If self rules over me in any area of life, then I need a Saviour. God wants to save me from self and sin in all its forms.

One day I was doing the dishes in my kitchen, I reached for another cookie. In my mind came the thought, you have had enough, say no to those cookies. This was God speaking to me through my reason, intellect and conscience, I understood clearly later, but at the time I sensed it was God but wasn't sure. A struggle now ensued because, my tastes and former habits said - do it, you like it. What would I choose? To follow God or self's former ways? The battle with self is the greatest battle we ever fight.

In the past I'd resist the cookies or candy and choose self-denial for a few minutes or hours, until it was such heavy drudgery, then sooner or later I'd yield to the pull of my fleshly desires. My promises, true in heart though they were, became as ropes of sand. With failure comes frustration, guilt, despair, and despondency! Why is the Christian life so hard I'd often ask? Later I discovered it was because I was doing the warfare against self **in human will power alone**, and every such effort must fail. I was independent of God rather than dependent on Him or working with Him.

I will try God! What shall I do Lord? I put away the cookies but couldn't stay in the kitchen. I walked away from the kitchen keenly aware of my desire for those cookies in the cupboard. Distraught I cried out to God again saying, "What do I do now Lord?" I took my vacuum out and began vacuuming my living room distraught with the temptation. After a time the thought came - "Do you still want those cookies?" My reason thinks, of course I do this usually takes a long time to go away if it goes away at all. But I looked to my tastes to find if the longing remained. To my surprise - it was gone. My wrong desires, tastes, and even the feelings were gone! My flesh was subdued. What made the difference? I called out to God for help and cooperated with Him in obedience. I had surrendered the temptation to God instead of resisting it myself. As a result God could change me on the inside. What joy was this experience! Jesus is able to subdue my flesh when I give it to Him and follow His will.

Oh Satan still tempts me to my old ways but following James 4:7-8,

I will
try
God!

Satan and even wrong feelings must flee from me. It is Jesus that subdued the feelings and from whom Satan flees. The real battle is to surrender my heart to God and go forth cooperating in resisting after this union and choice is made. Success is guaranteed even over the pull of appetite, **in** Christ Jesus and as long as I remain in this dependent, obedient position. Going against my feelings at that time was a battle. This connection did not take long, but it does take a decision to depend in Christ and not in me alone.

Friends, I saw a need to master this basic discipline of seeking and surrendering to the will of God in my Christian life. When I cooperate success is sweet. Are you gaining success in this way? We all can be living, walking Christians only **in** Christ Jesus. Despair is the devil's ploy to keep us separated from Christ and this experience of victory.

This habit was a bondage to me. I had not control over it, it had control over me. My struggle here was different than just eating a cookie. I needed a Saviour to change my wrong habit to keep on eating. God may be dealing with you in other issues of life, please take the principle I am illustrating from my experience and apply it to your area of difficulty. You may deal with lust, pride, gossip, an unrestrained tongue, gluttony, anorexia, bulimia, alcoholism or any perverted taste with which you struggle. These could be habits or addictions that have us. We then need to come to our Saviour Jesus Christ, then in and with Him we can find the power over these habits.

Saving grace is not just something we claim in Jesus, but is also being set free from the wrong thoughts, emotions, tastes and desires, when I reach out to ask my Father to help me, to give Him permission to change me into His image. When I ask and cooperate, God is able to change **even me!** Do you long for freedom from these habits too? God is calling you.

Jesus wants to be our Saviour from self. Jesus personally wants us to filter, every thought, every habit, every step of our life through Him, so that we can live above the pull of the flesh. Have you discovered the path the Saviour leads us, to take us out of self? **First**, He leads us to cry out in our helplessness to Him for help. **Second**, He wants us to know His will, He tells us we can obey and serve Him through His Word and His still small voice suggesting this freedom to our conscience. **Third**, we have to choose whom we will serve, God or sin and self. Our choice placed, even timidly on God's side, will often begin the battle with self. God calls us into a life of self-denial, and self-control **as it is in Jesus**, the flesh retaliates from restraint, that is its nature. But thank God we have the power of choice to choose which side we will serve! **Fourth**, we must willingly enter the battle, leaning heavily upon Jesus as our General to direct us in the warfare. "Whatsoever He saith unto you do it ... do it." John 2:5. The battle can be short or long, depending on our willingness to surrender to God. Remain surrendered, connected, and in union and communion with Him and the victory is guaranteed. You will enter into a life above the pull of the flesh, mastery over self!

What then is a Saviour for? A Saviour saves us from serving sin and selfishness. A Saviour needs to lead, direct, communicate and guide us to the right hand or to the left. A Saviour is a Shepherd that leads his sheep in the path that is best for them, protects them from all danger, and feeds them corrections, reproofs, or the truth, lovingly. The sheep hear and recognize the Shepherd's voice. See John 10:27. Do you know

this kind of a Savior?

We moved out to Montana 14 years ago to seek God and desired to walk with Christ as Enoch did. Once here, we began to ponder who will teach us the way? We thought we might have to go to a special school or institution to understand such a life but all God's providence said no.

God said, "**I will instruct thee** and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go." Both of us were deeply impressed that **God wanted to teach us personally**. Jesus wanted to be our Principal, our personal Teacher right in our own home. We didn't need to go anywhere else to obtain the education of God's planning. He wanted to teach us how to cooperate with Him and be saved from serving self right here, where we were! As we discussed our thoughts with each other we felt so unworthy of God being our personal teacher. How awesome is the love of God to us erring mortals that He wants to associate this closely, this personally in order to teach us how to have mastery over self as it is in Christ. Friends, we tried God, He is the best Teacher, Friend and Saviour, always giving the right counsel whenever we sought Him. He longs to lead you and I in the path of righteousness today, its up to us daily to choose to abide with and in Him. Won't you let God teach and lead you?

We can all enter into God's saving grace and be saved from self, from our inclinations, passions or appetites that are opposed to God. Whenever we cry out to God, and then also cooperate in following Him out of serving the old paths and into serving the new paths of life, He will personally lead us aright. With Christ all things are possible. Will you abide in Him supremely? Taste and see God's salvation from self serving that is found in Christ Jesus for yourself. "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." Matthew 1:21. Let Jesus save you **from your sins**, He cannot save you in your sins. God bless and lead you aright in gaining an ever greater experience in saving grace.

Power for Living



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