



### *The Testimony of Stephanie Owens*

I thought that since 2002 that I was a Christian. In mid to late 2002, I was 22 years old, living with my boyfriend, and had a most definite hate for God. In fact, I was an atheist. One night while living with my new boyfriend, I decided to become a Christian. I said a prayer to God and believed since then that I was saved. After doing that, my life hardly changed at all. The main change was that I would now tell people I was a Christian. So years went by, then in, I believe 2005, I started reading the Left Behind book series. I got scared. Around that time, I started going to church, reading my bible, and praying. Again, I felt confident in my Christianity. My going to church lasted about a year. After that, my reading my bible and praying started to decline until it was no longer part of my life. However, I didn't question myself about being a Christian.

In the winter of 2007-2008, I was overcome with the knowledge that I was going to Hell. This was unlike anything I had experienced before. I was scared, but unlike when I was scared in the past, this time it got worse not better. As days and weeks went on, I became more convinced that I was going to Hell regardless. Hell became so real to me, as if I could feel the heat as I went about my day. I was so scared that I had committed the unpardonable sin. It was so sad to know that God was real, and that I could not have a part of him. I started talking to preachers. I started e-mailing people who I thought might be able to tell me if I had gone too far, if I had been given just enough religion as a child to hang myself with. I was so lost, I was told by many that I had not gone too far. I was told that I just needed to believe in Jesus. This caused questions in me, because I thought that I had believed in Jesus, but I couldn't shake the knowledge that I was going to Hell. I also couldn't shake all the questions about salvation, like "what was different about this time?" If belief causes you to be saved then why wasn't I saved? Because I knew that I wasn't saved. So my search continued, I was back in church, reading my bible, praying...but peace never came.

During one of my searches on the book of Hebrews, I came across International Outreach. I was going to e-mail, asking if I had committed the unpardonable sin. I can't remember why, but for some reason I decided to just call. I called and spoke to Mr. Nichols. He was straight forward, and what he said had a ring of truth to it. I wasn't a backslider, but in fact, I was lost. He didn't tell me to "just believe," he told me to seek God. He sent me the books, *Genuine Salvation*, *The Narrow Way*, and *Spiritual Refining*. I started learning about seeking God, something I don't believe I had ever heard of. Over the next several months, I started to get to know myself. The person I got to meet in the dark alleyways of my heart was disgusting. I was nothing like the polished, super sweet, super honest, loving, caring, would do anything to help you, person that I presented to the world. I knew that I deserved Hell, I still do. I just didn't want to go there. Hell had bothered me. Why would God, or how could a loving God create people that were going to Hell? Why would God make us, then give us a sinful nature, then punish us for having the nature that He gave us? I was blaming God for my sins. Such arrogance, such pride! When we talked about Hell, it was a very revealing conversation. I didn't understand why Hell had to be forever. I thought it shouldn't be forever, or at least, not as bad as the Bible describes. My compassion for those in Hell was nothing less than a mask covering my disdain for God. My compassion was nothing more than a veil, suggesting that God was wrong, unkind and unjust. During seeking, I learned that God would be just if he decided to save everyone but me. I understood that I might seek but never find, and I saw the justice in that. I had no right to make demands on God. The nightmares were intense. The fear was overwhelming. Hell was always before me. Every day things scared me. Running on the treadmill, I could have a heart attack. So no running while I was alone at home. No touching water, showering, washing my hands, washing the dishes during a storm just in case of lightning. Driving became difficult, because my child would be in the car with me. Sleep offered no relief; Hell was even there, too. I believed that I could feel God's wrath and judgment upon me.

During these months, I was speaking to Mr. Nichols. He would encourage me to keep seeking. I got a collection of tracts from him, and a book by Jonathan Edwards. It was a collection of sermons. Reading *Knowing the Heart*, helped me to see the depravity of my own heart. Mr. Nichols would give me verses to read, but most of all I wasn't made to feel crazy, although at times, I might have sounded that way. I wasn't made to feel annoying, and that my fears of Hell were justifiable. Questions were answered with patience, not with a sigh followed by "you just have to have faith."

As my seeking progressed, it was suggested that I read passages in Isaiah, Matthew, and Luke. It was during those readings that I believe I fell in love with Jesus. The fact that he would leave Heaven, be so obedient, have so much compassion, love, and have righteous anger overwhelms me so much. What vanity to think of the things I was doing to avoid dying. Terrified of driving, working out, even eating alone. I could be in a padded room, and if God wanted me dead, I would die. Suddenly, Heaven sounded wonderful. For as long as I can remember, Heaven sounded boring, and now it sounds marvelous. To praise Him forever, to worship at His feet are what I long for now.

I thought that I would know I was a child of God, if and when it happened. That wasn't the case for me. Doubt is something I struggle with. I guess I thought that I would sin less than what I do. I read "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Works of God" and saw much of myself in it. I pray that assurance will come, and I have faith that the will of God will be done to bring glory to Him. And that is a great source of happiness for me. I've learned that seeking isn't just until you find Him, but an every day, forever sort of thing.

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