

Tony Hochtetler's Testimony

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Date: 14 January 2024

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[0 : 00] I've been asked to share my testimony this morning. There's a lot. It's hard to put it all into a small testimony.

But I did my best yesterday, the day before I started writing some things down. I think I'll start when I was pretty young. I believe I was 15 or 16 when I first decided that I was going to give my life to the Lord.

And the part in that right there is that I feel like I decided, you know, I was like, I can do this. You know, I feel like, and we'll get back to that some more too, but there's a lot of times where I wanted what God had, but I didn't want to give up what I already had myself.

And it'll come out a few times in some of the things I've written down here. But I feel like especially the first time and also other times as well, but the first time I invited God into my life and it was good.

But, you know, soon after that, I feel like, you know, there was maybe a short time that I would walk in victory. But soon after that, the Lord would bring things into my life and I needed to surrender them.

[1 : 20] And I was not willing. And that was always something that always held me back is just that self, that I can do this on my own. And just I think the perfect definition is just pride.

And so, yeah, I just wasn't willing to surrender what God would show me. Throughout the past years, I'm 27 now.

I don't know, but that was 15 or 16, so almost 10 years ago the first time. And throughout those years, there was times where I would recommit myself to God. But I was never willing to fully surrender.

And, you know, there again, I would have times of walking happily. And I believe that, you know, I believe God was there. But like I said, I just did not want to give up things that I had.

And I think the last time was a few years ago. I think somewhere around three years ago. I recommitted my life to God. And it was really good. But there was a time that I was into things.

[2 : 27] And it really, it was really good through that time. But soon after that, again, God would bring things to my attention that I needed to surrender. And I just wasn't willing.

And I just made a small list here. But there's a lot of other things, too. But some of the bigger things that I was not willing to surrender was my car, my truck. You know, I wanted what I wanted, and I was going to have that.

And I was not willing to surrender that. But money, sex, wife, children, all that. I would not give that to God. I was like, well, it doesn't really matter how I live.

You know, it matters how I live. But those things are here in the world, and I can enjoy them. And so I just, I was never willing to give up. And like I said, there's a lot of other things as well.

The future is one of them. I just, I could not give that to God. I was too scared of what he would ask of me. Or, yeah, just the fear that I had that, oh, God is going to make me go to a mission field.

[3 : 27] Whatever it was, there was just always these thoughts that would come to me. I wasn't able to just surrender that future to him. Yeah. And so he would convict me of these things, especially soon after a few years ago.

He would convict me and bring those things to my attention. Money was a big thing for me. You know, I can provide for my wife and my family.

And I just, I can do it, right? And no matter what, I just, I was, I wasn't willing to give that up. And so God would convict me of these things, especially soon after that I had decided to walk with him again.

But I kept pushing that away. And I pushed it away so long that I believe that, you know, I don't know how many times that he came to convict me, but it was quite a few times. And, yeah, I think after that time of just continually rejecting his conviction, he finally decided that, well, Tony wants to go his own way.

[4 : 32] And I think he withdrew his conviction from me. Anyway, the last three years have been really difficult. But, yeah, he just no longer would bring conviction to me.

And I knew it. And I didn't, at the time when it started, I didn't think much of it. You know, a few years ago, I was just who I was. It didn't matter. And, you know, I was so proud. And I was just not willing to, you know, talk to anybody about it. And just, I was so bound by lust and pornography. And there was a lot of other things as well, like I shared.

But those two things were the big things in my life. That I just, I loved the sin. I hated what the sin did, but I didn't hate the sin. And I believe, I think I was talking to Merlin the other day, and he just made that comment that we have to actually hate the sin, not just what it does to us.

And I just, that really blessed me because that was exactly who I was. I didn't like the reaping and the results of it, but I didn't hate the sin itself, so I just, therefore, I was just in it. And, yeah, so just not convicted about really anything at this point.

[5 : 42] A few years ago, I just, there was nothing really anymore. But yet, I, you know, I could still, I could still come to church and put on a nice face.

And, you know, there was a lot of people that knew there were sins that were in my life that were very questionable. And I'll get to that in a little bit here.

But anyway, so being as God withdrew his conviction from me, I no longer was convicted about anything and ended up going down such a dark road to the point where I was unfaithful in my life. And through all that, that burden that I had for my sins that were on me, I was so afraid of death. I was so scared if I would die. All these things that I did, and yet, God would not, wouldn't convict me. And I was actually to the point where I thought I might have blasphemed God.

[6 : 45] I was probably, I mean, it was the scariest place that I was ever at. And I asked, this was probably, I was trying to remember the other day, but probably six months ago, approximately, four months ago, maybe.

I asked God if he could just soften my heart so that I can repent because I knew that there was just no way that I could take this anymore. And even through that, you know, I just, there was no, no conviction, nothing would happen.

And I was just such a cold person. And finally, about a month ago, or actually about two months ago, I had decided that I was going to share with my wife just everything that I had done and was into.

And I was going to do it. You know, God didn't convict me or anything, but I decided that I just can't do this anymore. And I need to somehow talk to somebody or I need to do something other than what I was doing.

So I decided that I was going to share with her everything. And so this was, I think, about close to six weeks ago.

[8 : 00] We went on a date, you know, it was on a Thursday night. We went to Missou on a date. And it's a long story, but we started talking about just life and the things that happen in the world, you know, the world, right?

And, you know, just all the unfaithfulness and just the pride of my lust, all that stuff. And it came to the time where I just had an opportunity to share with her.

And I couldn't, I, I couldn't do it. I couldn't, yeah, I just couldn't tell her all the things that had happened and all that.

So, but obviously through that, she knew that I had something that I needed to tell her because she's a smart lady. And so she knew that something was bothering me very much.

I think that was probably the quietest hour and a half ride that me and my wife ever had together. Come home from Missoula. I might have said two or three words. So it was, it was already really hard.

[9 : 02] But, um, so the next morning, Friday morning, she texted me and I think I was at work or something. And she just asked me to talk that evening. And I knew if I don't say that I will, then I won't.

So I text her back and I told her that, that I will talk to her Friday night. And so that Friday evening, I, I shared everything with her.

You know, even though God had still not brought conviction to me, I, uh, I shared everything with her. And that was extremely difficult, especially just by myself.

And so I, I shared everything with her and, uh, she was heartbroken. Her heart was shattered. But yet here I sat there with her.

You know, I had tears in my eyes, but I didn't cry. And anyway, so that was really hard for me because that's when I really realized that I'm a really hard person.

[10:00] And I had decided that if I'll share with her and that I was also going to, that was on a Friday night.

I had decided that Sunday I was going to share with the brothers and a few of them. And I just, I couldn't do it anymore. And, uh, so Saturday came and I was Friday night.

I shared with her. Saturday came and she ended up going to Calispell with some friends and, uh, spent the day in town there. And they prayed with her. It was, it was good, I think, for her.

Um, she came home Saturday night. I took care of the children Saturday. That was probably one of the darkest days of my life. Just that depression, just, I can't explain it, but just very, just discouraged, not knowing what's going to happen.

And so she came home Saturday night and we were going to have some come Saturday night. And I told her we can just cancel. We have things that are going on. And she said, no, it's fine. They can come.

[11:02] So I decided that, well, I'm going to go get ready. It was probably about 20 or 30 minutes before they were going to be there. And I decided that, uh, I'm going to go take a shower.

And my next notes here. And I didn't, I wasn't really thinking of it. Obviously I was thinking of all the things that we were talking about and going through.

I mean, that was the only thing that I was thinking about. But I went and I got into the shower and I just kind of put my head under the water. And all of a sudden God brought that conviction of how God's so good.

He brought me to my knees. And anyway, he, uh... All of my sins were right before me.

I could actually see them. And, uh... I think I'm going to read songs to it if you want. If you want to turn there, you can.

[12:10] If not, that's okay. Okay. And this is when David is speaking here.

I just, I can't quite describe how I feel, but this psalm here really just kind of up. And, uh...

Have mercy upon me, O God. According to thy love and kindness, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercy, blot out my transgressions, wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight. That thou mightst be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

Behold, I was shaped in an iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

[13:15] Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me, and make me to hear joy and gladness. That the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

Restore in me with the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors that ways and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Deliver me from the blood-builtness, O God, thou God of my salvation. And my tongue shall sing aloud of the righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.

For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it.

If thou delightest not in burnt offerings, the sacrifice of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure, undesired.

[14:21] Build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings. Then shall they offer bullocks upon

thy altar. And, anyway, just in here, in one of these verses, it says how that my, his sin was ever before him.

And, that's exactly how I felt. I felt like, I know I was very blinded by a lot of the things that were going on. I mean, I knew they were all wrong, and there was a lot of things that I needed to change. But, all of a sudden, God brought that conviction. And he, I believe he allowed me to see where I was actually at. And, through all that, I'm standing in there, and I'm weeping, and I'm, I cried for a while before I could even talk.

And, I asked God to forgive me, and I thanked him for another chance. And, he forgave all of my sin. There's a lot of things that came to my mind in there, but hypocrisy was one of them. Just the life that I was living, I, a lot of people knew that there was some issues, but I don't think anybody knew that they were as dark and deep as they were.

[15:35] And, yet, I would act like I was a Christian. And, yeah, I think that was one of the biggest things that hit me, was just a double life.

And, anyway, so I just, yeah, I just begged for forgiveness, and he did, he forgave me. And, I fully surrendered everything to him, you know, and I feel like I've maybe done that before.

But, this time it's different, because, soon after that, he brought those things right back to me. Money, vehicles, my wife, my children, the future.

And, this time I did give it to him. And, that was hard, I'm just being honest. But, thank you, Jesus, for that. And, I just, I feel like I got to this point where it was so dark that I don't have any choice but to surrender it.

I just, I, we do have a choice, but I choose to surrender that and keep it, keep self on that cross.

And, you know, and Ezekiel, it talks a little bit about, it's one of my favorite verses, especially this last week, it just really hit me.

[16:42] But, Ezekiel 36, 26, it says, A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away this stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.

Thank you, Jesus, for that. I just, I just praise his name, because that's exactly, like, that is exactly what we're having. And, that hard heart, I just, I can't, I cry every day.

I just thank Jesus for that. You know, we have a soft heart, he can work with that. And, I just, oh, thank God for that. You know, I was a sinner living for myself.

Actually, let's go to Ephesians here. We'll just read in Ephesians 2.

Let's go and read through 1 through 10 there. 1 through 10.

[18:07] And verse 4 is just so powerful. But God, who is rich in mercy for his great love, wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.

By grace he is saved. By grace he is saved. And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That is the ages to come. He might show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.

For by grace he is saved through faith, and not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto God, unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. And I just, I was talking to James some, and that verse 4, it just, yeah.

You know, you see what all these things are, and that's who I was. And then verse 4, it changes. But God. And I just, I love that. I just, that is witness to me so much. He is so rich in his mercy.

[19:17] We can't even begin to describe the mercy that he has for us. And I'd also like to just read in 1 Corinthians 6. There's just a little bit there that I'd like to see here.

Let's do this, there's just two verses, 9 through 11 there.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

And verse 11, I just, yeah, it's the same as that other verse 4. Such were some of you. That was me, but no more.

[20 : 40] I just, I thank God for that. Thank God for that so much. I have a few more notes here. So I was a sinner living for myself, trying to do as many good things as I could, trying to look good among people.

And, you know, the Bible teaches very clearly that our best efforts are like filthy rags. And, you know, to go look back and I'm like, man, I did a lot of nice things for people, right? Those are filthy rags. They're filthy rags. Because I didn't have what God wanted me to have on the inside. It was just all external and outside of myself. I could just do things, right? And so good at making myself look good. But inside there was all the pride and the lust. You know, people would ask me, hey, how are you doing, you know? And sometimes people would even ask me spiritual questions. And I would be accountable to some people. But, you know, soon I was no longer accountable to anybody because I didn't want to be. [21 : 42] And I would always just tell people, you know, I'm doing good. I'm all right. And I remember not too long ago, probably, I was trying to remember the day, but I think it was this last summer, fall.

One day I was here and I think I was frustrated with somebody or I was just angry about something. I don't remember exactly, but my mom asked me how I was doing. Actually, I don't even know if she asked how I'm doing.

She told me I'm not doing good. And I just wanted to share that because I think that might have been part of when I was, it hit me pretty hard. Because I didn't like it for her. But she was right. And she just, she said she doesn't know what it is, but she said there's something in your life, if there's hurt, pain, something, that's causing this attitude and this flare-up that happens often.

Anger was another thing that I struggled with a lot. And anyway, through that, I think soon after that, I was going to actually ask God if he would soften my heart. And he did.

[22 : 54] And I, looking back now, it's hard sometimes for me to understand how God works. But I believe that God withdrew himself from me. And, you know, the only way that I was able to do the things that I did was because I didn't have God.

There's no way to say, well, I'm walking with him on a struggle. That's not a possibility. The things that I went, the road that I went down, God was not with me in any way. And so, anyway, I guess my point I'm trying to make is I decided that I'm going to go after myself and the things that I want. And God decided, okay, Tony, you're allowed to go that way. It's your choice. He never forced anything on us. And he allowed me to go down that way. And then all of a sudden, I realized where I was just on my own, but I couldn't come to God.

And I say that just to say that I think, looking back now, I think God wanted me to take a step. Because God already, he took his step.

He sent his son to die for us. And I think he wanted to see if I was willing to confess or if I was willing to take that whatever the step may be towards him and just in faith.

[24 : 05] And I think that's why when I confessed to my wife, I think that's why the next day came. And, you know, when he brought that conviction, I couldn't confess enough.

I just, yeah. There's, when we get that conviction, I just, I, there's nothing as special as that. When God calls you, and, you know, we get called, you know, for the first time, we get saved, and that's great. But God, God calls us and brings conviction lots of times. I've come to realize that in the last five or six weeks or whatever it's been. God will always give us things. It might not be every day, but it will be often. And another thing I wanted to say, kind of going back a little bit, another big thing was music.

I had over 4,000 songs on my phone. And I could sit here and be like, well, there was a couple. Well, when I got saved, I'd be a problem. Because I just wanted to start again.

[25 : 10] And so I just got rid of all that. And I think, you know, country music was a really big one for me. And I listened to those things, and I believed that those things became a reality in my life.

Just the lust of the, I think that was a way that the devil could get into my life. Even though I still wanted those, right? But I never was going to give that up. And so I just share that just as a testimony that we need to be able to fully surrender.

There's a book that I read, and there's a few back there that, you know, you feel like you want to read it. Take them. It's a good book. And I just feel like that's such a, that's the only way that this is going to work, to walk with God, is to fully surrender.

And whether that means getting rid of your songs, if it means getting rid of your phone. I mean, whatever God calls you. I think whoever is here, we all know what that is for ourselves. It might be different for somebody else. But if it's something that you struggle with, and you think you should maybe, well, then you shouldn't. That's just how I see it for myself. I just, I know that I'm able to think that, you know, I just, well, it's probably not too bad.

[26 : 17] But anyway, it was for me. So let me see where I'm at here. Anyway, I will share that in Romans 8, I just actually read that, I think it was this morning. It says, for to be carnally minded is death and enmity against God.

There is no room for carnality in Christian law. I just wrote that down. And there's a lot of other verses in there. But that's something that I often would just say, well, maybe I'm struggling or I'm just kind of carnally.

I'm like, that's who I am, right? That is a lie. God has no room for carnality whatsoever in his life. And in the Christian law. And I think the biggest thing that, for me, that really stood out later than looking back is, as far as carnality was language.

And just the things that I would say and the things that I would act like, I look back and it just grieves me. A lot of the things that I said, just how carnal, how carnal that was.

And right here in Romans, it says that it's death and enmity against God. I just, it's exactly what it is. And I feel like I can actually see that now.

[27 : 26] And so, yeah. And there's a few of you here that I probably said things in the past that were just very off color. I apologize to you guys for that. But it's something that I struggle with a lot.

But the Bible talks about taming the tongue. And the only way you can do that is a poor loser. Poor loser.

Anyway, I stand here today a changed man. God completely changed and renewed my life, my mind. You know, I deserve death. I deserve hell. But God sent his son to pay for my sin.

I always think of this as a story that these men, they took him and they crucified him. They put the nails in and they hung him on the cross. But I'll tell you what. The last while I've been really thinking about that.

And I believe that it was my sin also that held him on that cross. He died for me. And that's the only way, is it, my sin held him there. And so I just, yeah, the cross has really, really been renewed in my mind on what it actually means.

[28 : 28] And how that he gave his own son because I can't pay for what I did. He paid for it. I just, I thank him for that. And now the exciting part is that, yes, that he was crucified.

He paid for our sins, but he didn't stay there, Gloria. He rose again. And we serve a living Savior. And, you know, just looking back, I was just reminded of this part.

And I said living. Living Word. It was always the Bible to me. But I'll just share real quick. I would always, I'd never bring my Bible to church.

I just didn't. I was like, oh, I have it on here. And it was a lot deeper than just that. So I always, I would encourage everybody to bring your Bible.

It's, you know, you can have it on your phone. And that's great. But if you can, bring your Bible. It's a very special thing. And it's become very special to me. Because, yeah, that next Sunday, the first thing I went for was the Bible.

[29 : 32] I just, yeah, it's a very special thing. And it's a living Word. It was never really living to me until the last couple of weeks. It's just so, it's so full of things that just speak life. And it has some incredible direction.

Just, yeah, it's amazing to have the Word of God. We need to be thankful for being able to have the Word of God in our homes. And there's a lot of countries that they cannot. And I just want to share yet, too, that I do believe that it's appropriate that I get baptized.

In Romans 6, 4, it says, And I believe that I have that newness of life.

And I want to be baptized. And I, you know, baptism is very special. And, you know, it's an outward showing to the devil.

That's one of the biggest things for me. And I want to show the devil that I'm no longer his, I'm God's. And I just, I thank God for that. So I just, I'm very excited for that. I don't even remember why I have this.

[30 : 44] But I have Romans 12 in here. If you want to turn there. Just verse 1 through 3 there.

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your body as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to the world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God, where I say through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly according as God hath dealt, to every man the measure of faith.

And I just, in that verse there, to present our bodies a living sacrifice. And that's another thing that I never, I mean, yeah, I know what that means, but I've never really experienced that or really thought much of.

But we are to be a living sacrifice. He needs to be able to use us. And there again, the only way that that's going to be possible is that full surrender. I just, I can't say that enough. And I, it's me.

I'm talking about myself. That full surrender is the only way that he can work in us and use us that way. Be not conformed to the world, but be transformed.

[32 : 22] Renewing of our mind. And I just, God has completely changed how that I view things and how I see things. Completely renewing of the mind. And I just thank him for that.

And I think that's pretty much all I have for my testimony. And there's a lot of other small details that anybody ever wants to talk about anything. An open book. But that just kind of gives you an idea of where it started and how it's been in the last, I think it's been just over five weeks now.

And I, you know, at first it was probably the hardest week that I ever experienced in my life. Sharing with everyone. And one other thing that I will say is I shared with my family, her family, and also the brothers in the church.

And one thing that the devil made me believe for all those years is that you can't share it with people. I believe that. I believed it for all those years.

I can't tell people that what I did. I can't confess that. I mean, it's just they're never going to forgive me. And there's just, it's going to be horrible, right? And yes, there was, it was hard.

[33 : 34] And I'm sure it affected people a lot. And I know it did. It should have. But that is a lie from the pit of hell. Because when we confess our sins, it talks about confessing our sins that we may be clean.

And that's exactly what I've experienced. So if there's anybody here that has sin that you're scared that somebody might look down on, I think that's one of the biggest lies that the devil will try to make you believe.

So confess your sins because that's the only way that you can experience true freedom. And not just some, all of them. That's a full surrender is confessing all of them. And I would just say, you know, if you don't remember anything that I said today, probably the number one thing is that has really spoke to me and stood out to me is if God calls, convicts, or draws any of us, me included in this, let's respond.

If he convicts us, let's respond now. Because we don't know how long or how often he will call you. I've experienced that firsthand, just not being able to hear him or to confess to him.

You know, I could confess, but there was just no drawing. So when the Holy Spirit draws us, let's be open to that and just humble ourselves and just confess. And not reject that.

[34 : 58] Yeah, and I just have this last verse. You know, it says in the Bible, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I just say it. That's one of my favorite verses. Because that's what happened. Thank you.