

God's Grace to Me
The Personal Testimony of Mark Kolchin

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy..."

Psalm 107:2 (NKJV)

My testimony was truly one that emphasizes the goodness and mercy of the Lord. I did not have the privilege of growing up in a Christian home. It was a good home in many ways, but one in which Christ was not present. My mother divorced my father when I was very young, due to him becoming interested in another woman. Years later, my mother related to me that, she read the Bible while she was going through this personal turmoil prior to my birth even though she was not a believer at the time. I often think of the influence that the Scriptures had on me before I was even born and wonder if this had a bearing on me becoming a Christian later and subsequently entering "full-time" Christian ministry.

My mother eventually remarried a very nice, gentle man who was a self-employed auto mechanic. We did not have a lot of money as I grew up (dirt poor actually) but I did not know it since it was normal for me. However, even though it was, I was always concerned when I had friends over my house, that they would not trip over transmission lying around in the backyard!

When I was seventeen, things dramatically changed in my life. All during my childhood years, no one in our family knew the Lord, though we attended a sizable Methodist meeting in a nearby town. I don't recall hearing the Gospel preached, but if it was, we were blind to it and eventually our family lost interest and stopped attending. For several years, we were part of the "unchurched" segment of society until a sickness in our family providentially stirred interest in attending "church" once again. At first, my ten-year-old sister began attending a Friday night Bible club hosted by a NT assembly in town. She had been invited through a friend who brought her one Friday night to earn "points" awarded to those who brought their friends. There is value in adopting these incentives! My sister was first in our family to profess faith in Christ. She had come under the sound of the Gospel and made a profession of faith in Him. As a result, my mother then became interested in attending services on Sunday mornings. Part of the reason for this interest in the things of God was due to my stepfather became gravely ill with colitis. It seemed that he was at death's door. This new turmoil in her life heightened her sense of need for the Lord's help and intervention. Once again, life's challenges proved instrumental in having a spiritual impact in our family. Upon the Gospel clearly presented and faithfully proclaimed, she also trusted the Savior, just as my sister had done the year before. Simply put, God was at work in our family. As a result, my mother encouraged me to attend youth group activities. At first, I was very reluctant since I had my own circle of high school friends. But my mother countered and arranged to have a family over from the assembly. Introductions were made and a few days later a follow up phone call was made by a member of this family to invite me to a youth group activity. The invitation caught me off guard, but strangely I accepted. To this day, I don't know why I said yes, other than the Lord was directing my steps. With some reticence, a few nights later I hopped into a car of total strangers to head off to a youth group event not knowing what to expect. God works in mysterious ways!

When I arrived at the home of the youth gathering, I witnessed a group of teens my own age that genuinely seemed to be enjoying themselves. It was obvious to me that this was a different brand

of people. They were not like the friends that I kept company with - friends who put each other down and strove for popularity. They were different in their attitudes and in their words toward each other - and they were very kind to me and included me in every activity of the night. Near the end of the evening, someone shared a brief message from the Bible and closed in prayer. I don't recall what was said that night, but I do remember the effect: there was a warmth and friendliness toward me and a joyful, spiritual atmosphere that pervaded that group of people. It made a deep impression upon me and there was no question in my mind that I wanted more. It served to open the door for me to visit that local assembly the following Lord's Day. What I witnessed was even more astounding. The preacher that day was easy to understand. The environment was bright and cheerful – no burning candles or somber atmosphere. When the speaker got into his message, tears rolled down his cheek, but it did not derail him from giving his message. What a powerful impression was being made upon my soul. In time, after repeat visits, I responded to the Gospel being faithfully proclaimed and my spiritual eyes were opened. I too joined my sister and mother in trusting Christ as my Savior.

In the years that followed, I took an active part in the life of this NT assembly. Youth group, then college and career, regular Sunday morning attendance. There were Bible conferences and regular attendance on a weekly basis to remember the Lord with like-minded believers. All these activities were vital aspects of my early development as a Christian. The constant spiritual encouragement I received from older brethren was truly a blessing and of inestimable value in my formative years as a young believer. It launched me in the Christian life and helped me understand that we all have a ministry and opportunities to serve the Lord wherever we are and whoever we are. In my estimation, it made up for not receiving the "benefits" of being raised in a Christian home.

After going off to college, I returned to “plug in” at the place where I had come to know the Lord. I got involved in youth group leadership and then established a state-wide College and Career fellowship in NJ. I enjoyed serving the Lord and bringing other believers together to enjoy fellowship and to receive solid teaching from capable brethren in the Lord. I went into secular business for several years, and even moved in the direction of obtaining securities licensing for a career in financial planning - a big thing at the time. Financially and professionally, I was moving forward in my career, but always felt a greater interest in the activities of the local assembly and serving in whatever way I could. I was given the opportunity share in the ministry of the Word at times and enjoyed this mainly because it forced me to study and to know the Word to teach it. It was far more rewarding than climbing the corporate ladder. In time, I married my wife Cindy who was a graduate of Emmaus Bible College in Dubuque, Iowa. In 1993, after having met with the elders we were commended to the grace of God for the work of the ministry wherever He would lead as we serve Him by faith. In 1995, my wife established Know the Word Ministries to encourage the Lord's people by offering conferences and special events to strengthen the Lord's people wherever they are.

Having now served the Lord by faith for over thirty years, we can truly say, “Hitherto has the Lord helped us. We have four grown children who have all made a profession of faith in Christ. We enjoy a ministry that keeps us busy at home and internationally in a ministry of speaking, writing, serving on several Christian Boards and organizing conferences and special events for

the Lord's people. Who would have thought that all this would come out of a simple invitation to come to a youth group event many years ago. Only the goodness and mercy of the Lord can do these things! Praise His Name.

Mark Kolchin – Dec. 11, 2024