

THE ANATOMY OF A CONVERSION

1 ³⁵The next day John was again standing with two of his disciples. ³⁶When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, Look, [there is] the Lamb of God! ³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸Jesus turned around and saw them following, so he asked them, What do you want? They replied, Rabbi, (which, being interpreted, means, Teacher), where are you staying? ³⁹He said to them, Come, and you shall see. So they came and saw where he was staying. They stayed with him that day. [Now] it was about the tenth hour [of the day when this occurred].* (Jn. 1:35-39)

* it was late afternoon

1 ¹⁴Now after John was imprisoned, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is about to come; [therefore,] repent, and believe the gospel. ¹⁶As he was passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷Jesus said to them, Come and follow me, and I will make you fishermen who catch men. ¹⁸Immediately they left the nets and followed him. ¹⁹Going on a little further, [Jesus] saw James the [son] of Zebedee, and his brother John, who also were in the boat mending the nets. ²⁰Immediately he called them. They left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him. (Mk. 1:14-20)

5 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with a multitude of people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, ²he saw two boats lying by the shoreline. The fishermen had left them, and were washing their nets. ³He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to go out a little from the land. Then he sat down and taught the multitudes from out of the boat. ⁴When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Go out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch. ⁵Simon answered and said, Master, we labored all night and caught nothing. However, because you say so, I will let down the nets. ⁶When they had done this, they caught such a great amount of fish that their nets were breaking. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. ⁹[He said this because] he and all who were with him [in the boats] were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken; ¹⁰and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, Fear not; from now on you shall catch men. ¹¹After they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. (Lk. 5:1-11)

Introduction

Let me share with you the story of former football player, Ed McGlasson.

I cried out to God in the ambulance, "Why, God? Why me? I'm a ... Christian. I've asked You into my life."

“Because you don’t know Me,” He answered. “You say, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and yet you do not do what I say.”

How the truth stung that day. I, “Big Ed” McGlasson, had for two years been a big phony. I had accepted Jesus but allowed sin to remain in my life, and now God was dealing with me to help me get it all together.

I had grown up in a strict Navy environment.

I was taught to be a self-made man. When Dad found out that my vision for the future involved playing professional football, he went right out and bought me Keds tennis shoes and Sears five-pound ankle weights, and started me running two and a half miles per day.

Because we were in the Navy, it seemed we never had enough money ... Saving my pennies so that I could run to the store to get a pint of regular milk (not thinned down as at home) gave me an early appreciation of “things.” Like so many, I thought that if I could just get all the “things” I needed, I would be happy.

“Events,” like being able to play football, made up another area of life that I felt was important. These four items—things, events, the right people and the right places—were my idea of what life is all about. I did everything I could to get what I wanted. When something didn’t line up the way I wanted it to I was in a bad mood and treated the people I loved with anger and frustration.

But God started to work on me. At college I met ... Fred Davidson, ... a long-haired Jesus freak. He was always smiling, and I hated his guts for it. I couldn’t see how anybody could be that happy. I wasn’t; I was miserable. I was playing football, doing what I wanted; yet I wasn’t satisfied with life.

Then everything started going wrong ... I was living in hell, fooling myself. When things, events, people and places didn’t line up the way I wanted, I used drugs and drank to escape reality.

Late one evening in August of 1977, several of us guys were looking for something to eat in the dorm. Fred just happened to be cooking some chili in his room as I went by. When he said, “Hey, man, come on in and have some food,” I was surprised at his hospitality and love towards me. As we ate, he shared how Jesus came to give us life and not death ...

As Fred spoke I realized for the first time that what I had been involved with was only religion, but what God desired was a personal relationship. When Fred asked if I wanted to receive Jesus into my heart, I told him yes. ...

I started really believing then that God’s hand of grace was on my life. But He was calling to me to change, and I was resisting Him, still allowing sin to remain.

The next season, eleven days before our first game against Villanova, my left knee got hit. As I rode in the ambulance, in intense pain, I was really scared ... My knee was just hanging there and I had been told that I would never play football again.

I was sent home that night to put ice on the knee and see what would happen. Bill Romanoski, a friend from the Coalition for Christian Outreach in Pittsburgh, came to see me. He said, "Ed, you've got to give your life totally to Jesus." He told me, "God can heal you if you want, but you've got to give Him your whole life."

I had been acting as though I were walking with God. I was president of a campus fellowship that I had started as a 6:30 A.M. Bible study and that grew in one year from one to a hundred, and yet I was withholding part of my life from God.

That night Bill, Bob and Kevin asked God to heal me ...

The next morning I was taken into the hospital. I was in a wheelchair, waiting to have the orthogram on my knee. They prepped my knee for surgery and I was told not to eat.

The doctor came out to talk with me, looking very surprised. "I don't understand it," he said. "There is nothing wrong with your knee."

I got really excited. I knew God had healed me. The doctor dismissed me from the hospital ... I took a five-mile walk and talked to God. I rededicated my life, confessed my sins, and told Him I wanted to serve Him 100 percent ...

... God had shown me for the first time in my life that His power is real. From that time on, Jesus was no longer just a guy in a book to me, but Someone who is exciting to be involved with.

[Finally, in 1984, Ed said], "God, I'm not going to run anymore, but I'll follow You with my whole heart."

"It is only when Jesus takes over totally in our lives and leads us into His good purposes for us that we experience real joy, peace and satisfaction. There's nothing greater than serving Him, bringing hurt people to Him and seeing Him make them whole. Praise God! He is terrific!" *VOICE* (A Full Gospel Businessmen's publication) October 1984; pp. 2-6

The thing to notice from this testimony is that Ed McGlasson's surrender to Christ was not an instantaneous event, but was rather the climax of a relatively long spiritual process. He started out as a self-made man whose focus was on earthly things and worldly success. Then God began to work on him. At college he encountered "a long-haired Jesus freak" whose Christian joy made an impact on Ed.

In August 1977, through this Jesus freak, Ed was introduced to the gospel and asked Jesus into his heart. Ed now recognized that God's hand of grace was upon his life. Christ was calling him to change. But Ed was resisting Him, still allowing sin to remain.

In the case of Ed McGlasson, God got his undivided attention by means of a severe knee injury. A Christian friend exhorted Ed that he must give his life totally to Jesus, without reservation. At this point the Holy Spirit convicted Ed of his hypocrisy: he was president of a campus fellowship, yet he was withholding part of his life from Christ. In Ed's case, the Lord granted him a miraculous healing, which transformed Ed's relationship to Jesus. From that time on, Jesus was no longer "just a guy in a book to me, but someone who is exciting to be involved with." Ed now confessed his sins, and told Christ he wanted to serve Him 100 percent.

What you see worked out in the life of Ed McGlasson is the same thing you find worked out in the lives of the disciples. Because the act of unreserved surrender and true saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is often the climax of a spiritual process, it is important to know at what point you are personally in that process.

I. Are You at the Point Where You have become Acquainted with Jesus? (Jn. 1:35-39)

God has raised up prophets and preachers, like John the Baptist (Jn. 1:35-36), to point men to Jesus. Why? He has done so because Jesus is our only hope for salvation. Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle Peter declared, *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12.) Furthermore, God has raised up Old Testament prophets and New Testament preachers to point men to Christ because the devil tries his hardest to divert our attention away from Jesus. In times of prosperity there is the temptation to say, "I don't need Jesus. I don't want Jesus to disrupt the plans I have made." But consider what the Lord Himself says, *"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"* (Mk. 8:36.) In times of hardship there is the temptation to say, "I have too many problems to think about Jesus. If I ever get my problems solved, then maybe I'll have time for religion and Jesus." But again consider what the Lord Jesus says, *"seek first his [God's] kingdom and its righteousness, and all these things [i.e.; the necessities of life] will be given to you as well"* (Matt. 6:33.)

Like these two former disciples of John, you, too, may have been pointed to Jesus (Jn. 1:37): maybe you have come to the point where you are interested in Him, maybe you have determined to seek Him out and make His acquaintance. If you seek Jesus, you will have a personal encounter with Him, this is the promise that the LORD makes: *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart"* (Jer. 29:13.) This was the experience of these two disciples of John the Baptist (Jn. 1:38-39.) As they pursued Jesus, Jesus turned around and addressed them. He inquires as to their motive, *"What do you want?"* He is asking, "Are you

interested in Me? If so, for what reason?” Their response indicates that they are serious about knowing Jesus: *“Rabbi, where are you staying?”* They are telling Jesus that they want to enter into fellowship with Him and become His disciples.

In response to their sincere interest, Jesus invites them, *“Come, and you shall see.”* Jesus invites us to enter into His life, with its earthly self-denial: *“each went to his own home. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives”* (Jn. 7:53-8:1); *“any of you who does not renounce everything he has cannot be my disciple”* (Lk. 14:33)—to “renounce” means to give up one’s rights to something. It is also a life of service and humility: *“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Matt. 20:28.) But it is a life that is filled with heavenly glory: *“To him who overcomes I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne”* (Rev. 3:21.) Listen again to the testimony of Ed McGlasson:

It is only when Jesus takes over totally in our lives and leads us into His good purposes for us that we experience real joy, peace and satisfaction. There’s nothing greater than serving Him ... Praise God! He is terrific!

Like these two men, maybe you, too, have even made some kind of response to Jesus; we learn that they came and stayed with Jesus that day (Jn. 1:39.) Here is the first step in the direction of true faith in, (which involves complete surrender to), the Lord Jesus Christ. In your life you, too, may have taken the first step towards true faith in Jesus. Maybe it was as a young child in Sunday School. Maybe it was in response to the gospel invitation at an evangelistic crusade. Maybe it was during a personal crisis in your life. But maybe, like these men, it was only the first step, it only seemed to be meaningful to you “for a day.”

II. Are You at the Point Where Jesus is Seeking You Out? (Mk. 1:14-20)

Some time has elapsed since that day spent with Jesus—as seen by the fact that John the Baptist is now in prison. The scene has shifted from the vicinity of the Jordan River, not far from Jerusalem, to the shoreline along the Sea of Galilee.

As Jesus walks along the shore, whom does He see? He encounters the very same men He had met some time ago, on the occasion of John the Baptist’s witness. What are these men doing? They are engaged in their usual occupation: the fishing industry. Nothing seems to have changed in their lives; they are not following Jesus, they are living the way they have always lived, going about their routine business.

This time Jesus seeks them out. He approaches them and calls upon them to follow Him. We read that they immediately left their nets and followed Him. But this is not yet the end of the story.

Can you identify with these men at this stage of their spiritual lives? Is Jesus calling you? Is He saying, "Give me your heart?"

"Give Me your heart," says the Savior of men,
Calling in mercy again and again.
"Turn now from sin, and from evil depart,
"Will I not help you? Give Me your heart."

"Give Me your heart," says the Spirit Divine,
"All that you have, to My keeping resign.
"Grace more abounding is Mine to impart,
"Make full surrender and give Me your heart."
(Eliza E. Hewitt)

III. Have You Come to the Point Where You have Made Full Surrender to Jesus? (Lk. 5:1-11)

Once again the scene is the shoreline along the Sea of Galilee. Once again we find these men engaged in their usual occupation. Once again Jesus seeks them out.

This time He gets Simon Peter to do an act of service for Him: *"He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to go out a little from shore"* (Lk. 5:3.) Here is a preview of Simon Peter's coming life of service. Then the Lord Jesus rewards Simon Peter for his service:

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Go out into the deep, and let down your nets for a catch ... ⁶When they had done this, they caught such a great amount of fish that their nets were breaking. ⁷So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. (Lk. 5:4,6-7)

This time there was true, saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as evidenced by the following responses they make to Christ the Savior. First, there is the conviction and confession of sin: *"Simon Peter ... fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Depart from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!'"* (Lk. 5:8.) Second, there is total surrender: *"they ... left everything and followed him"* (Lk. 5:11.)

These are the characteristics of a genuine conversion: confession of sin and change of life (from self-centered to Christ-centered.) There must be the confession of our own personal sinfulness before the Lord Jesus Christ; as the Apostle John informs us, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 Jn. 1:9.) Accompanying the personal confession of sin, there must be the total surrender of your life to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus declares, *"any of you who*

does not renounce everything he has cannot be my disciple” (Lk. 14:33.) As noted previously, “to renounce,” means to relinquish control; to hold “in an open hand” whatever Christ has given to us, willing to allow Him to take it from us if He sees fit to do so. The Apostle Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:15, “[Christ] died for all, so that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

Have you come all the way to this point in your spiritual life? This is the point of conversion. For these men, commitment meant leaving behind their former occupation as fishermen. For you, it may mean the same, or it may mean continuing in your present occupation, but with a whole new perspective. It means no longer viewing yourself as a businessman or farmer or teacher or laborer who goes to church; but now viewing yourself as a disciple of Jesus Christ who happens to be engaged in business or farming or teaching or construction work or factory work, and who offers this occupation as part of his service and witness for Jesus Christ his Lord and Savior.

Conclusion

Where are you in your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you come to the point of conversion, where you are moved by the Holy Spirit to pray: “Lord Jesus, I stop trying to save myself, I trust in You as my Savior. “Lord Jesus, I will no longer live for myself, help me to live for You, my Lord.”