

## God is So Faithful!

by Stacy Shirk

*A Transcribed testimony given at Charity Christian Fellowship*

The Lord has been laying it upon my heart for some time now to share a few things with each of you. As I look back at the last few weeks, there is no way that I can sit back and not give the Lord praise and glory. The Lord has done so many marvelous works in my life, and especially the last two years, I hope I can adequately express with words just how faithful He has been time and time again to me and my family.

I feel like I have to go back a little bit before my salvation to fully show God's tremendous faithfulness and love towards me. I have really struggled with sharing different parts of my past because it is so difficult to admit how unfaithful to the Lord I was. However, when I was a lost, heart-broken sinner sitting in these pews the testimonies of others were very encouraging to me, offering me hope when I felt like I didn't have any.

So, I'm going to start back with my childhood and let you



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know what the Lord has saved me from. I was raised in a Bible-believing atmosphere, we were not plain people and we did attend the public schools. Up until I was fourteen or so my father was in the ministry at various places and we were considered a very "godly" family. Our family was very involved in church and at the age of nine I heard a sermon on hell that really scared me, and as soon as we got home my father went through the plan of salvation with me and I

asked the Lord to forgive me of my sins and I accepted Jesus into my heart. At this time I now had the confidence in knowing that I did what I had to do to escape hell. My Christian walk, I have to admit, consisted each night of asking the Lord to forgive me of my sins, which were becoming more and more as the years went on.

By the time I was fourteen my parents' marriage was totally devastated by sin in both of their lives and the church where my father was preaching closed its doors. I was now a young teenager in the public school whose life had been turned upside down by the things going on at home. Once the church closed we never had a church again that our family attended regularly and our home life quickly became troubled. All too soon we children were swallowed up, so to speak, with the "normal" school atmosphere which included rock music, alcohol, and immorality. However it wasn't until I was eighteen and living in the dorm at college that the bondage to sin started. By this time I had already had quite a few immoral relationships with different men and was totally devastated in my heart how far sin had taken me and how my life was turning out. The heartbreak of knowing that I had failed God, and knowing that the hopes and dreams of being morally pure were now just some faraway dream of a little girl, were almost unbearable at times. Being in an ungodly, immodest college environment is not something a young Christian should ever face. My life was now saturated with ungodly friends and friends who did indeed name the name of Christ but whose lives were in bondage to sin and the flesh.

By the time I met Cliff, who was from a plain background, I didn't care anymore what happened to me, and I had resolved that no good will ever come of my life, therefore I just gave in to the party scene playing out all around me. At this point I didn't know any other way to deal with the hurt that was within me and very, very regrettably I pulled Cliff down also into the hell I was living. Our lives became a total disregard of the things we both

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had been taught as children. Well, of course, due to my immoral lifestyle, at nineteen I found myself faced with an unplanned pregnancy. At this time I was also involved with other men without Cliff's knowledge and so I was unable to fully express to Cliff my concerns and fear. I didn't care about any of the men I was involved with—they were all just an attempt to fill a void that was in my heart. I am so thankful for the faithfulness of God towards me at this point in my life. My mother had just taken my younger sister for an abortion and she assured me that if I did the same, I wouldn't destroy my future as a nurse. She told me that there was nothing to the abortion—my sister was in and out without any problems. Little did she know that I had just been upstairs with my little sister who was having great emotional and physical pain. I am so grateful that the Lord did not allow me to be swayed to making a decision that I would regret the rest of my life, like my sister now does. I strongly argued with my mother that she had taught me that abortion was murder and I would never consider such a thing. At this point my parents felt it best that they then raise this child as their own. I looked at the state that we children were in and I knew that what this baby needed was not going to be found in my parents' home. Well, now I was faced with quite a decision and I could not rely on my parents for help. I knew Cliff was the only decent guy I was involved with at this time and I believed him to be the father of the child and I knew in my heart that he would be a good father. So unfortunately our marriage started out with much deception on my part. Because I did not love Cliff like I should have I really didn't care if we stayed married or not, and regrettably I caused much hurt in Cliff's life.

It was at this point, newly married, pregnant and going to nursing school and college full-time that my thyroid started to give me trouble. By the time I was five months pregnant I was put on bed rest for high blood pressure. The sin and the heartbreak of the consequences of sin had started to take its toll.

When I had my daughter, Hope, the Lord gave me such a love for her I couldn't stop thinking that someday I needed to do better with sin or else she would be affected by it. By the time she was six months old I had put her into day-care and was back to college. My health was a constant source of trouble, but it wasn't until we were blessed four and a half years later with our little Nadia and I was put on bed rest for six months that I would allow myself to truthfully look at the word of God and see how big of a need I had in my life.

After Nadia was born we were faced with the decision of where to send Hope for school. I was struck with fear of what the public school would do to her. My older sister suggested something called homeschooling. I had never heard of such a thing, so we went up to the homeschool fair in Harrisburg. It was when we were there that some strange-looking people gave Cliff a set of tapes. I took one look at them and told Cliff to give it back—I didn't want anything to do with people who looked like that (I was looking at Denny's family picture). Well, thankfully Cliff refused to give it back, because of all things he actually knew the guy who shoved the tapes at him. Roy Ulrich had been a deacon at the church Cliff had attended with his parents. The faithfulness of God was still at work. When I first heard Denny on the tapes he preached just like my Daddy preached when I was little. We had gone to one church after another since we had gotten married, partly because of our sin and partly because I was searching for a preacher who would come right out and speak the truth like my father used to. God had my full attention at this point as I listened to these tapes. Of course the first one I listened to was "Where Are The Men?" because I knew my husband needed a full overhaul. After I gave that one to him to listen to I became real brave and put in the one on the "Radiant Wife". To say the least I cried and cried the whole tape through, for not only was I not a radiant wife, filled with the joy of the Lord, but I didn't even love my husband; so I didn't have a desire to be a radiant wife. For the first five years of our mar-

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riage nighttime was always the hardest for me because the heartache of sin was much more present then and I remember as I cried myself to sleep I would beg the Lord for a little love for my husband. It was at this time, as I listened to God's truth on the home that He started to answer my prayers. The first sins He started with were anger and bitterness. The Lord had a lot of work to do in my heart to prepare a way for the truth. I will be eternally grateful that He promised to never leave me nor forsake me.

Well, we found ourselves moving to and from Missouri and it was at this time that we were disgusted with the hypocrisy we saw in many Mennonite people. We started to attend an Independent Bible Chapel and were greatly blessed for three years until a series of events opened my eyes to the fact that I was now raising my girls just like my parents had raised me. I saw young girls being influenced by young children who once again named the name of Christ but lived like the world. We once again came back to Charity in June of 2001 and I had been deceiving myself in believing my life was cleaned up. However, as I sat through one sermon after another the Lord started to show me that the outward appearance had become more godly but the inner bondage to sin was still there. For two years I prayed

the Lord would help me with the sins of my youth that I couldn't break free from. No matter how hard I tried, I would time and time again fall back into sin with the same old things of partying, alcohol, and immorality yet be at church each Sunday. Until revival meetings came in August 2003 I was a completely miserable person still heartbroken over the effects of sin, riddled with guilt over the unfaithfulness to God and troubled in my soul because I felt that as a Christian surely God would give me the power to overcome these sins, yet He hadn't even though I begged Him too.

I came to the point where I was done pretending I had it all together and I asked for help. I was counseled the first night to go home and pray that if I was indeed saved the Lord would give me "His witness within" and I would know

that I was saved. Well, I went home and prayed and prayed and all the Lord brought to my mind and heart was sin. So after sharing my past and the bondage to sin the Lord brought a deep cleansing repentance to my heart, years and years of sin and turmoil came out and the Lord replaced them with His love and peace and His Salvation! Praise God for His Faithfulness!

With most of my sins that I was in bondage to, the Lord took them completely away at that moment. But Satan did not want to give up this battle easily—he had the rule over my life for 33 years and he wasn't going to give up without a fight. A few months after my salvation I was free from all those things that had tortured me from youth except my addiction to immorality. I wasn't physically sinning at this point but in my mind I still was and Satan was there to quickly point out every failure I had when it came to certain men around me. After counseling with our dear brother Denny again, I realized this was the battleground on which Satan wanted to convince me I was a failure and that my salvation was a complete hoax. Denny encouraged me to look at this as a battle, to ask Jesus for help each time an impure thought came to mind and fight with the Word of God, prayer and singing. After two months of what I would call intense battle I started to have peace in my mind. I started to see the joy in living like I had never experienced. God had miraculously changed not only my heart but my mind as well. Praise God for His Faithfulness!

I had enjoyed a month of peace when I found out that after waiting nine years for another child, when we had long ago given up on the chance of ever having another baby to hold, we were expecting a precious new life. How could my Savior who forgave me and saved me from so much now only a few months later bless me with what my heart had desired for so long? How could he possibly love me that much?

Once again Satan didn't want this all to work out to the glory of God and ten days after I found out I was expecting I was told that I had thyroid cancer. I have to admit in the beginning of the pregnancy I thought, "Well, you reap what you sow, and this must be my punishment for disobedience against God." At this point Denny told me about two tapes on God's love and told

me that the Lord does indeed love me and the best thing for me and my unborn baby was to understand His love in my heart and be at peace. So I went home and I cried to think, as I listened to the tapes, that I had been denying God's love towards me.

The next battle I dealt with was facing well-meaning family members and doctors who suggested that I take care of myself so I can be around for the two children I did have. They suggested that I have my thyroid out during the second trimester of pregnancy which is usually the recommended course if a pregnant woman facing cancer decides to keep her baby. However, the doctors told me that there was a one percent chance that I would lose the baby. I quickly told the doctor that if there was one percent chance of my baby dying I couldn't even think about the surgery. They all looked at me like I was an alien and proceeded to tell me that they couldn't guarantee that the cancer wouldn't spread during the pregnancy, but it was my decision. After going home I decided that I did not feel comfortable going back to these doctors and decided to do some research on the internet. What I found was an endocrinologist who was world renowned for treating pregnant women with thyroid cancer. She had a totally different perspective and was openly grateful for the children she had and told me that we had to get started with certain medications to ensure that I had a healthy baby. She realized the life of my child was extremely important to me.

I have to say that the Lord gave me a peace throughout the whole pregnancy that left me to rest in His arms. My usual battle with high blood pressure during pregnancy was taken completely away after only being in bed for three weeks, something totally unheard of for me. The Lord was continuing to shower me with His love.

On September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2004, we had our precious little Joshua Clifford, straight from the arms of Jesus. He was absolutely, perfectly healthy. His name Joshua means "Jehovah saves." I continue to thank the Lord for the miracle of him each day.

A couple of months after Joshua was born we prepared for thyroid surgery, but I knew the Lord was urging me to be anointed with oil and prayed for by the ministry, so we did that down in the couch room with Denny and

Aaron and close friends. What a blessing that was to my soul.

When the thyroid was out and we got the pathology report we were told that the cancer had spread to the blood vessels. Only two percent of the people with my cancer have this complication and it greatly increases the chances of death. At this point I have to admit I struggled with fear of the unknown. What was the Lord doing now—was I to prepare to say goodbye to my little ones? My doctor was telling me that the only chance I had at survival long term was to have the radioactive iodine. The radioactive material was to kill any cancer and thyroid tissue left in the body after surgery. So we prepared for the week of isolation where I would be required to be away from everyone for a week. Aaron & Janice Hurst were going to keep the rest of the family, and the morning of my scan and treatment we left the children and all their things at the Hursts. I did not know how I was going to survive the week alone. I did not know how my precious baby was going to do without me but most of all I have to admit I was worried that the whole body scan was going to show that I had cancer throughout my body, and I would only have a few weeks to live.

They did the scan early in the morning and we waited for hours for them to read the scan and prepare the dose of radioactive iodine. As we were waiting, one of the doctors came out and said that I needed more tests, and that I needed to go to my doctor's office. Now I knew a lot of people were praying for me at that time, and the whole time I was in the scanning room I was praying that my Savior would once again reach down and touch this daughter of His. When we got to the doctor's office she told us that she had good news for me—that not only could they not find any cancer, they could not find any remnants of the thyroid tissue that they had left there during surgery. She told me that they see this in one in about two hundred patients, and they have no idea why. She said we have certain tests I must do this next week to make sure it wasn't a false

negative scan, but for now, go home and hug your baby. Today I am here to testify that all the tests have come back clear and the Lord God, our Great Physician, had indeed come down and took not only any cancer left but even the remaining thyroid tissue.

I am an undeserving daughter of the Most High God. I will never fully understand the depths of His love for me while I am here on this earth but I have to admit that He has opened my eyes to the way He has been faithful to me time and time again. May I ever give Him the glory and honor He alone deserves for saving my soul, saving my marriage, giving me the blessing of children, and saving my life from cancer.

In closing, the Lord has put a few verses on my heart time and time again since I was told I had cancer. One of them is Isaiah 43:2—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame

kindle upon thee." The Lord himself was not only present in my heart through all these past trials but He faithfully fulfilled this scripture for me through many of you. When I felt like I was going to drown with fear and anxiety, someone was there

for me encouraging me and pointing me to look up to my Savior. When my physical strength was failing me someone was there to carry me through. But most of all, when I would recognize the full magnitude of what lay ahead of me, someone was on their knees on my behalf. "Thank you" does not express the sincere gratitude I feel towards each and every one of you. The Lord has once again showed His unfailing love to me through all of you. Thank you so much for your prayers, your gifts, your time and energy spent on my behalf. Every time you lifted me up to the throne of grace the Lord heard your prayers. I truly feel like He has shown me a great amount of mercy and grace because of the faithful prayers of you all. I love you all and pray that each one of you have the peace in your heart that only the Lord can bring. □

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