

My Testimony of Saving Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

Pastor Grant Van Leuven



Uncertain Early Years

I grew up going to church, but I often refer to myself as a “mutt” in terms of my denominational background. I’ve been Presbyterian, Methodist, United Church of Christ, Lutheran, to name a few. Church was something we did on most Sundays, but I usually didn’t look forward to going, and was marginally content once I was there. My parents obviously thought it was important to go to church. But I don’t recall ever reading the Bible together, talking about God, or praying in the home. Except maybe for Thanksgiving Dinner in extended family situations, because that’s what you do.

The churches we grew up in, I don’t think they were very strong. For instance, a youth group Sunday School I did like going to in my teen years because there were a lot of my friends there and girls I had crushes on. Well, I remember the teacher saying one day about the miracles in the Bible—Jonah and the Whale I think being the focus of discussion—that we did not need to believe that these things actually happened. And we often watched movies that were pretty questionable. I wanted to watch them then, but now I do agree with my Mother who knew then we ought to be getting taught the Bible more than we were, and pulled us out. I was mad at her for that, but now I am grateful.

I was later confirmed in a Lutheran church in ninth grade, where I think several of the pastors who came through did demonstrate a genuine interest in the Bible and the Christian faith and living it. Unfortunately, the congregation largely did not. For instance, I was one of the few who actually memorized Scripture for confirmation class, and even those who didn’t show up often and failed the tests were confirmed. And confirmation also seemed to be *graduation* from church for most of the other teens. Thankfully, the Lord kept me going, I taught Sunday School for children, stayed involved in youth group, and didn’t lose interest. But I didn’t benefit from being around many adults or peers that seemed to really take living for Jesus seriously. Kind of a compartmentalized faith. I did benefit from several elementary and high school friendships on and off that were an influence on me. Invitations to Vacation Bible School and youth group events, Church concerts, that sort of thing. And I even went to a Billy Graham Crusade when he came to town with my family. I said the *bona fide* “sinner’s prayer” at a second grade summer Vacation Bible School, and remember telling everyone for a while about it as a sort of “get out of hell free card”. But while I think I could articulate the Gospel and I think I understood it, I’m not sure when I could point to and know where I personally assented and would be going to heaven. To most folks, I was a goody two-shoes. But I knew the Biblical standard, that I didn’t match up, and I wasn’t even really trying. This was evidenced by the fact that it was not an uncommon occurrence for me to be crying out for God to forgive me for choices I made and live.

Convicting College Changes

I went to community college my first two years, and during my commutes, I began listening to the Christian radio—mainly teaching and preaching. It was the start of how God began to work in me toward repentance that would bear fruit, although the seed took some time to sprout. For the first time, I heard many people talking about Jesus all the time as not a *part* of their life, but the *purpose* of their lives. And the sermons were unlike what I had ever heard in church. It wasn’t so easy to excuse my lifestyle in my heart anymore. I still didn’t change much, and most of my lifestyle “prudence’s” were more personal and stubborn legalism against peer pressure than concern to honor Christ. And I was not prudent in all ways according to God. I had read enough of the Bible to know it, which the Christian radio station programming began to cultivate in my heart as I drove to college each morning and evening. I didn’t feel quite as alone in my Christianity, and in a certain sense, was beginning to get fed and disciplined.

I went to Buffalo State College for my last two years, and it was my first time living away from home (Rochester, NY). I went generally with the idea that I would first get involved in a party life style I never had fully jumped into for a while, and then abandon it and get serious for Christ. Or, I would just get serious for Christ and find people to help me. God enforced the latter option. Early on, maybe even the first day, God led me to a campus ministry. I eventually was involved in some way with at least three of them amidst several campuses. I began to really be transformed by the influence of my peers who, away from home, chose to follow Christ. They wanted to get together to worship Him. To abide in His Word. To grow in faith. To serve and honor Him with their lives. And this was a tremendous impact on me. Godly peer pressure by example, mentoring, and even exhortation led me to lay down my life at Christ's feet.

I remember one time, at a fall weekend retreat, we were playing football in the snow. Yes, in the snow. It was Buffalo, after all. After one play that didn't go well for me, I cussed. Frankly, to most people, it probably isn't considered a cuss word. But a friend of mine who I would later become housemates with, and later still be in his wedding in West Virginia and become God parent to his son, corrected me. He simply said, "Hey man, you don't have to say that." I was a little surprised. But I realized he was right. I didn't have to do that. In Christ, and in His body of believers, there was no room or necessity for acting that way.

I often think of one of my favorite verses when recollecting on this transition and my friend's gentle note of concern: Galatians 2:20: *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

Christ died for me, and I died in Him, so now I live in His life, and He is holy. So I don't have to swear any more. And I don't have to do a lot of things anymore. Notice the freedom I began to experience!

The other major influence on me in my late college years was a campus ministry staff person and the pastor of the nearby church I began to attend. They both took me under their wing, encouraged me mightily in growing with the Scriptures, and involved me in Christian service, such as leading a Boy's Brigade program and helping to lead the Campus ministry, including evangelism events. Providentially, they both encouraged me to consider the ministry and seminary training at the same time (although they didn't know each other). And so I slowly pursued this for a decade until I graduated from the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA.

While in college, I remember one night in the dorm room especially that reflects my being conformed more and more to the image of Christ as the love for Him consumed me, and His Church loved and taught me. I was up late after getting my homework done, reading through the book of Romans in the New Testament. I was captivated by every line of Paul. So direct. So true. So logical. So alive. So transforming. I had read the Bible often, memorized Scripture, and even read the Bible from cover to cover once in Junior High just to do it. But I had never responded to the Word like this. By God's Spirit and in His timing and through His people, He was giving me appropriate repentance from sin unto God and an endeavor to live in new obedience. And this was increasing my faith. His Word was becoming alive to me in a way that I had not yet experienced. As the book of James says, draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. God helped me come nearer to Him through Godly people who got together to glorify Him publicly and shared their lives with each other in Christ. And in so doing, He was drawing nearer to me in His Word. And while I still learned more and more, or perhaps I should say, was convicted more and more of things that needed to go in my life, I now really wanted to change. For Christ's sake. Proverbs 16:6 says, *By mercy and truth is iniquity purged; and by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.*

Living Now with the Hope of Glory and Eternal Life

One of the things that seems to haunt me the most in life these days is my mortality. Our mortality. I look at my three young children playing, consider my tiring frame and receding hairline, and am profoundly hit with the thought that we will all soon be dead. This isn't going to last. For instance, I'm sure my grandparents all whimsically and with some melancholy watched my parents, and even me and my brother and sisters playing, in a similar manner. Joy and

excitement and hope for what will come for them. Fear for what is to come for them. A bitter sweet concern that I hope I'm training them right, that they'll remember me with love when I'm gone. And knowing I'll be gone. And as young as they are, soon they'll be watching their own children and grandchildren playing, and trying in some small way maybe to give them some sense of who their granddaddy or great-granddaddy was. My name is Grant Edward Van Leuven. I share that name with my great grandfather. I never knew him. I know only an old faded picture of him. In many ways, practically speaking, he never existed for my experience, as much as I try to know that I know he existed. The same is sure to be for me. And that is sobering. The same also is to be of you.

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. So says the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40:7-8).

Since it is true that I am fading, but the Word of God stands forever, here is where I have found my hope. My eternal hope. I am trusting in the Word, Jesus Christ, who gives everlasting life to all who believe.

As he says in the book of John:

John 3:14-17 *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

I have looked to Christ on the cross to pay for my sins and save me from hell. I have trusted Him when He says that he is the truth, and the truth sets me free. I'm already experiencing this in this temporal life, free from the bondage of sin. But it particularly gives me hope to wait for the consummation of His Kingdom and our bodily resurrection when He returns on Judgment Day. What about you? Here's a summary of this Gospel hope I cling to, to which I implore you also to hold fast:

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures ...*

1 Corinthians 15:52-57 *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Have you repented of your sin and trusted in Christ's righteousness and payment for your sin on the cross to save you, make you a new creature, and ready you for everlasting life in the presence of God Almighty? Do you have this hope of victory over death that is my only comfort? Let me encourage you to read God's Word, perhaps first the book of John, and to find a strong church to make a heavenly home in and begin to be challenged, fed, nurtured, and transformed. God has ordained that you do not get to heaven on your own, but through Christ. And you do not grow in Christ on your own, but as part of His body, that is, the Church. Let me encourage you not to go it alone. Frankly, it is impossible. And, as John writes in the third chapter of his Gospel account, the Father seeks men and women to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. It is to this end that He saves them—to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever within Christ's body, the Church.

I invite you to come hear Jesus in the preaching and teaching of His Word and come and see Him and be graciously embraced by Him through His living body of believers, the Church.

I serve and worship at:
Puritan Reformed Presbyterian Church

Services:
Sunday Worship, 10:30 am & 5:30 p.m.
Wednesday Prayer and Bible Study, 6:30 p.m.

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Thank you for reading my testimony of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. My prayer is that you will soon have your own testimony about saving faith in Him and worshipping Him in faith with the hope of heaven in your heart.

Grant Van Leuven,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Grant Van Leuven". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light green rectangular background.

Pastor