

My Journey Home

From: **Know and Believe:**
A Lifetime Journey toward Rediscovering God's Love for You

Taken from Chapter 1: My Journey Home
by C. D. Hildebrand

Dear Friends,

For the month of September in 24-7-365 on our website, I will be sharing with you excerpts from my book, Know and Believe. I hope it will be a blessing to you and inspire you to read the entire book. The book begins with my testimony of returning to the Father. Please enjoy.

My mother was a “preacher’s kid” during a time when legalisms included not reading the comics and only being allowed to wear clear fingernail polish on Sundays. She was surrounded by many unreasonable religious standards and expectations that God never intended for His people, along with the crushing pressure to be the picture perfect eldest preacher’s daughter. The good news about this, from my perspective, is that while she lived under a profusion of law and legalism, this motivated her to raise me with an abundance of love and grace.

So it was, the first seven years of my life. God’s love surrounded me, and I could feel it so intensely. My earliest memories are of singing songs about Jesus’ love for me in the backseat of our car and sensing God’s love with all my being.

*Jesus loves me; this I know
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong.
They are weak, but He is strong.*

*Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me.
Yes, Jesus loves me.
The Bible tells me so.¹*

The people of our church communicated God’s love for my mom, my brother, and me through many kindnesses toward us. The pastors’ family often invited us to their home to visit with their children and eat with them. When we had to leave that church to go live with my grandparents over

¹ “Jesus Loves Me”, William B. Bradbury, 1862, Public Domain

1,000 miles away, I remember a particular adult in the congregation whose eyes filled with tears when he discovered we were leaving. How deeply that love was felt by a little girl who just lost her daddy to divorce.

The next church we attended would have been a frightening experience if it had not been that most of my twelve cousins attended the same church, which meant I got to see them almost every Sunday. The pain of divorce and loss of our loving church community was softened considerably by having aunts, uncles, and cousins in my life.

One of the positive things that happened there was that in children's church we did a lot of Bible verse memorization which helped me later in life. It was also at this church that I got down on my knees in the church pew without anyone's knowledge, while the grownups were at the altar, and formally asked Jesus to come into my heart. (He was probably already there because I sincerely believed in Him.) The adults were singing, "Into My Heart," so I prayed, "Jesus, please come into *my* heart."

However, somewhere along the line, while attending this church, my concept of what it meant to be a Christian was changed from simply *believing* in Jesus and His love for me to that of focusing on *not sinning* in order to be a "good" Christian. In my mind, refraining from sinning became the proof that one was a Christian. This gradually produced a distance in my relationship with God, and that wonderful unconditional love I'd known dwindled a bit, though I never completely stopped believing in Him.

At a young age, I began writing my thoughts about God.

*I close my eyes to say a prayer
And tell the Lord how much I care.
Although I cannot see His face,
He's standing there with all His grace.*

*He knows where I am
And what lies ahead
What I'm feeling and doing
And what's in my head.*

*He knows about
The hurts I feel
And understands
They are very real.*

*When I feel lost
And all alone
God leads me on
Won't let me roam.*

*And I know He will be here
Until the end of time*

*To help with all of these
Troubles of mine.*

*Even though I think
That I might die
I know He's here
Right by my side.²*

Paul wrote that the “power of sin is the law,” and this came true in my life just a couple years after composing this poem. A young woman who never desired to sin, began to sin and at some point stopped calling herself a Christian because she did not want to be a hypocrite. What was happening was law was strengthening sin in my life. It just automatically happened to me when I began basing my right-standing before God on whether or not I sinned (1 Corinthians 15:56).³

I'll spare you the prodigal daughter story here and skip ahead to when I reawakened to God's love for me. I'd prayed, “God, if You exist, please show me,” fully fearing that if He did indeed exist, He might strike me with a bolt of lightning for being so impertinent by questioning His existence.

Instead, from within my heart, the peaceful thought came to me, “If you don't believe in Me, why are you talking to Me?”

For someone majoring in psychology, the idea that God was communicating with me was unsettling. Perhaps psychiatric care was in order. On the other hand, if God *was* talking to me—well, what an awe-striking possibility, and while I tried to pretend that I could be making it all up, I was in wonder of the reality I could not deny—God was *speaking* to me.

Over the next few days, it was as if my eyes were opened to a deeper appreciation for the beauty of nature that surrounded me. Each time I would admire an aspect of it, the question would come to me, “Evolution, Cathy?” as if to challenge my developing opinion that everything gradually came into existence (instead of being created). In my Zoology class while dissecting an earthworm, instead of nodding in agreement with the idea that animal life gradually became more complex over time, I stared in amazement at the intricacies of it all.

“Evolution, Cathy?” Each time that question came into my heart, I became increasingly convinced that not only was evolution an absurd belief, but that God, yes, God was *talking* to me! He was showing me through the things He made that He existed.

² C. D. Hildebrand, 1969, age 15

³ Parents, it is very important to talk to your children about this over the years. You might not know what they are being taught by others in church. Make sure they understand that we are right with God by faith in Jesus, and NOT by not sinning.

Romans 1:19-20

What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Not wanting to jump to conclusions about God and determined to keep an open mind as to which direction I should head next, I asked Him, “God, You have shown me that You exist, but now what?”

What I was wondering was which religion was the right way to go. I did not want to automatically assume that Jesus was the right way just because that was what I’d been taught all my life. As many others of my contemporaries were doing, it seemed to be my time to set out on a journey of finding the truth for myself.

So, my search began that moment. Wondering where to start, I remembered the Bible that was in my desk. I would start my long search for truth with the book I had on hand.

“God, here’s my Bible. I’m going to read it, but You’ll have to explain it to me. I want to know if Jesus is your Son.”

With the most open mind possible, I opened to the book of Matthew and began to read. In only a few verses, I came upon the scene in which John was baptizing Jesus when a voice came from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”⁴

This one verse started this prodigal daughter on her journey back home. It was almost as if it was highlighted with light, and it became clear without one doubt that God was answering my question. I began to cry as I again had to acknowledge that God was conversing with me. Yes, Jesus is His Son. My search for the truth was already done.

Over the next weeks, between attending classes at the university, reading the New Testament became my focus. As a teenager, I’d read most of the New Testament, but it was more alive to me than ever before, and it was obvious God was speaking to me through it and bringing me to a place of decision. It felt as if I was straddling a fence with one foot in the world and one foot in the kingdom of God. There was a decision to be made. Would I respond to this truth or walk away?

As the days continued, a verse memorized in children’s church kept coming to my mind, though not completely, “If you confess Jesus, you will be saved.”⁵ Though I was speaking to anyone who would listen to me about “God,” it became obvious that I was not verbally attributing the changes that were happening in me to “Jesus.”

⁴ Just to clarify, that is what is recorded in Matthew. I did not hear a voice from heaven.

⁵ Romans 10:9-10

One evening, a friend of mine came to say hello while I was sitting at a table studying in the student union. Poor fellow! Did he ever get an earful while I talked incessantly about “God” this and “God” that—and each time I said “God,” there was an acute awareness that I was purposely not saying “Jesus.”

Finally, my friend asked me, “What is going on with you? You seem like you’ve changed.”

I knew this was my moment to “confess Jesus.” I thought about the decision I was going to make. From deep inside I prayed, “God, I don’t know what You want from my life, but whatever it is, I trust You will help me.”

Then I looked at my friend who was patiently waiting for my reply and answered, “It’s the love of Jesus Christ.” Instantly, I was “home” with my Father sensing His love and welcome intensely.

I nearly grabbed my friend, and said, “Did you hear what I said? It’s the love of Jesus Christ!”

From that moment, the thrill and amazement of God’s love for me once again filled my heart. Certainly, the angels in heaven were rejoicing. I thought I could fly from table to table, though I had enough sense not to try. Then, I became suddenly aware that I was missing my brothers and sisters to welcome me home, and by the next Sunday, this young woman who said I would never go to church again (because of all the church-going hypocrites I’d known), was in church praising God.

It amazes me that with only a child’s knowledge of the Bible, I was able to articulate what was happening to me. It was the LOVE of Jesus Christ that was changing me. Even as I recall that moment, my eyes fill with tears. I sensed so profoundly the Father’s pleasure and delight that I was home with Him. I instantly knew and believed that He loved me.

Luke 15:22-24 (personalized)

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on her, and put a ring on her hand and sandals on her feet.’²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;²⁴ for this my daughter was dead and is alive again; she was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.”