

# Too Late? Too Old? Mercy Says No!

Personal testimony  
of Joe T. Williams

Saved August 2, 1998

I think I have a great testimony. Of course, everybody who gets saved thinks they have a great testimony and they do because it's a miracle, it's really a miracle of God. I just want to tell you what God did for me. I remember every little detail of what God did for me.

I was born and raised in Hickman, Kentucky and I've been in church all my life. Mother would get us up on Sunday morning. You didn't wonder if you were going to church, you know. There wasn't a question whether you were going or not. You could play sick but you had to take Quinine or something like that. It was harder to stay home and be sick than it was to go, so we went to church. I was born in church. You could go down in the nursery there and when you were a baby, you had your footprint on the wall when you first came to the church.

I have always been religious. Once you've been born and raised in the church, you understand religious ways and you know how to act. You just learn how to act like the rest of them. It didn't mean that you were really saved or anything but you learn how to act, how to conduct yourself.

Well, I got under conviction when I was somewhere between 12 or 15 years old. I don't remember exactly when it was when God started speaking to me. We don't give invitations like they used to. A long time ago they used to give invitations. Those invitations would last for five or six verses and you'd think, "Oh, me." Your knuckles would get white where you were holding on to the bench and you'd think, "Oh, if I can just make it through one more hymn." That's the way I was for a long time - just holding on, but God was still with me. On Sunday mornings during revival meetings, the preachers would come to eat dinner with anybody in church if their husbands were lost or anything and my Dad was lost. So, Mom always had the preachers and one day I came home from school and I knew the preachers had been there for dinner. We had morning services and afternoon services and my Dad had gotten saved. Boy, that really was something. That night my brother went up front and I did to and they did the "pray the prayer" thing. When a little kid goes up front, that's just what you did. They would do the Roman road thing and I supposedly was saved. I tried to live a Godly life, the way I knew to live but I didn't live a good life. Back in those days, salvation wasn't anything really great - it was just something you did. When you became of age, you just got saved.

After I got lost, God carried me back and reminded me of things. When I was 18 years old, we'd go to Training Union and then we'd turn out and go do things you wouldn't believe. We'd been to church - we did our part - we were good little ole' boys. We raised our kids in what we called a Christian home because we went to church. All through the years, we'd go to church and if we got out of church for a time, we'd go back and rededicate ourselves. We'd just pick up where we were and went on like nothing was wrong.

But, one night, February 21, 1998, I was at prayer meeting. Man, we were having a good prayer meeting. God was just on one side. He was over there and I was on the other side on the floor. But God wasn't over here - He was over there. Boy they were having a good time over there and they were having a good time on that side. I'd just had my open heart surgery and I was laying over there and got to hugging my chest because I got to hurting. I'd think, "Golly Bill, God's over there - what am I doing?" Bro. Brian was praying and said, "If anyone be in Christ, He's a new creature - Old things have passed away." I had listened to that all my life because I'd been in church all my life. I'd listened to that - it had gone in one ear and out the other, no telling how many times. You know, if you've been in church 50 years, you know you've heard that numerous times. But that night, I heard it. God got to convicting me and when I was going home something happened that really makes me ashamed. I got

mad at God. I'm just a little speck but I was mad at God. I got up there around Wilson's Cemetery, now Arlington Cemetery, and I got to beatin' my fist on the dashboard and said, "OK God, I'm from Missouri - you're going to have to show me if I'm lost - you just show me God." I just threw a fit. I got over it about the time I got by the expressway and went home. Cheryl always asked how prayer meeting went. I said, "Oh, man, it went good", but it didn't go good for me. I was reading at the time on election, everything I could find because I wanted to make sure I was the elect. Anything I could find about election, I was reading it. I went back in the bedroom and was reading and fell asleep. It was about three in the morning. I had believed there was a God out there but I thought it was a big something out there that you prayed to. I had heard men pray, people that I thought could really pray and I'd hear them say, "Our Father, creator of the great universe ..." and I'd think "Man, that guy really knows how to pray." But He's not a God like that - He's personal. That night, God showed me who I was and it was real. I love that old song, "What sins are you talking about, I don't remember them anymore." And He doesn't. He's a God who forgives sins but forgets sins too. I don't understand that but He can and He does.

Anyway, He showed me who I was. I thought God was kind of like me, with Alzheimer's and He forgets things. But sin, that has never been paid for, is still sin, and it's in your life, and I don't care if you committed it when you were 13 years old, you can be 60, and by the way I was 60 at the time, it's still against your record - sin is sin. Well, He showed me who I was. He didn't show me all my sin - I couldn't have stood that. He showed me like a "bruised reed - I will not break". Boy, I was broken, I was bruised. He said "a smoking flax I will not quench." He didn't snub me out. He just slipped up there by me and showed me who I was. I woke up and I was just shaking. I went in and Cheryl said, "What's the matter with you - are you sick?" I was white as the rug and was just shaking and said, "No". I tried to say that word "Lost" but I couldn't say it. In a minute I got it out and said, "No, I'm lost." She came over there and put her arms around me and said, "Honey, I know it!" I thought, "How did you know it?" Boy, I thought I was doing good, that I was fooling everybody. But apparently I hadn't fooled anybody.

I didn't know what to do. I thought I needed to call Bro. Greg to tell him. So, I looked at the clock and it was 3 o'clock in the morning and I thought I'd just wait until the morning to tell him. I'll feel better about it in the morning and wouldn't be so upset so I'd just wait to call him. Then I realized who that was - it was Satan - so I'm going to call him now. I hate an answering machine but I even thought I'd leave it on the answering machine. I was going to call him and get this settled right now. So, I called Bro. Greg and the phone rang one time and he said, "Hello". I realized it wasn't the answering machine. God had woke him up at 3 and He was waiting on me. It was God's divine set up. I got that word in my mouth again and I said, "I'm lost". Boy, that was hard for me because I was prideful all my life - I was a very prideful man. I was a religious man, a Pharisee above all Pharisees. He talked to me for a while and prayed with me. Then Friday night, He and Janet came over. I remember one thing about that - just to tell you how prideful I really was. They were getting ready to leave and Janet said, "Well, it won't take long Bro. Joe - it won't take long for you to get saved." And I thought to myself, "Yeah, I'm pretty good - it won't take long." That's how prideful I was - that is pride. God says, "I view the prideful from afar off." God wasn't even close to me. He should have killed me the night I hollered at Him and got mad at Him but He didn't.

At the time, I was the church secretary and treasurer and was trying to lead the singing, doing the best I could and I told the church what happened to me and resigned. Lostness after 60 years was so hard.

You think you've served God for 60 years and all of a sudden you don't even know Him. Well, I remember that morning. I felt naked - God just stripped me. I got to trying to tell what happened and got in trouble. I finally told them what happened and I was lost. So, then I set out to be saved. When some people say they are lost, they're not lost. When God shows you you're lost, you're lost. You can be a nice lost, like a drowning person who says, "Pardon me sir, would you mind throwing me a rope." But when God shows you, you are nasty lost - you are LOST! And you start doing anything in your power to be saved.

I wanted to get saved really bad and Janet had said it wouldn't be long so God got to talking to me. God would tell me something and we would meet in a little prayer room in the church and I'd tell the men what God was telling me. One time I was in the shower and God reminded me about the Pharisee and the publican. Well, see, I thought I was the publican, down there praying and going to get saved. But I wasn't - I was the Pharisee. I was going to all the revivals and I was desperate. I'd go to Pontotoc and I'd have to go to work the next morning. I'd be home at 1 o'clock and had to get up at 4:30 in the morning. I'd do that until I was just worn out. But, I needed help. During this time, Grace had a tape ministry. I found out later that they would pray about each tape they would send out and I'd get a tape about every two weeks and I'd go to the mailbox to get my tape and would be so hungry and thirsty. I'd listen to that tape until I'd just wear it out. I'd ask Bro. Brian, "What do you think the odds are that a 60 year old man could get saved?" And he'd say, "Bro. Joe, I think the odds are really good." Well, I'd almost memorize those tapes. At Grace, I'd be in a service and feel God really call me and I'd always in my mind be waiting for that big service where I'd feel God and I'd go up front to get saved. I just knew I was at the end of my rope and I was going to get saved. I'd go up there lying in that carpet, broken and all of a sudden, it would just leave me. I'd think, "Golly Bill, what am I doing - I've got to get up and get in my seat." The night Beverly got saved, I was right there. I just knew God was going to save me but Beverly got saved. I knew God was there but He saved her instead. So, I decided I wasn't going to go up front anymore. I was just going to get saved in my seat - I didn't have to go up front. He can save me in the bathroom if He wants. I had it all figured out. I thought I was supposed to get saved that night, but I didn't. Bro. Terry came down and sat by me in the pew and I asked him what I could do. He jumped all over that and said, "You can't do anything." I'd try to reword my question and say, "What do you think it's going to take?" One of my favorite verses was "Shall I bring to the birth and not cause to bring forth?" I just knew God was going to save me because why would he show me I was lost and not save me. I was really particular with my words and he told me something. He said, "You can't put God in a mold - God doesn't have to save you." After this, I was really lost.

Bro. Greg would say I'd have to forsake my thoughts. I knew it said that but to me it would be like saying to a drowning man, "Hey, don't worry about it - you're going down but it'll be all-right." I didn't have any control over my thoughts. I thought of God when I got up every morning and when I went to sleep every night - that's all I had on my mind. I just knew I had to get saved - I was desperate.

One night at a revival, Bro. Victor Ward was preaching and the tradition was on Friday night you'd have the big salvation service. That Friday night I was waiting for the salvation message and you know what he preached on? HARD CASES! That kind of hacked me off - I was easy to get mad anyway. He preached on hard cases and that didn't apply to me at all - I wasn't a hard case. The next day, I was in a big cooler at work grinding meat and was praying all morning. I was having a real good time - I felt like all my prayers were going out. I was praying for all the hard cases. I had my list of all the people I

knew were hard cases but God turned it all around on me and said, "You're the hard case - you are a Pharisee - you're a two-fold child of hell." I can't tell you how that feels when God just turns it around on you. There was a lot of blood on the floor, big puddles of blood, from the meat. I got to crying really bad. It was kind of dark in there and the little light that was in there was bouncing off that blood and for the first time, I said, "I did this, didn't I - that blood was for me, God - You had to die for me, didn't you God?" I kept on praying and God was working on me. I needed to go find Bro. Greg to talk to him. I told Bob to put up my knives because I needed to go home. I told him I had sinus trouble and I had to go. I got out on the highway and the devil got to talking to me and told me it was no use in me going. I'd done this for years - I'd be under conviction and then talk myself out of it so I thought I'd go on home to tell Cheryl thanks for putting up with me and it got off of me. That wasn't my day. I went through all kinds of things like that - trying to find God.

I had a lot of tapes from Bro. Terry at Grace. He said if he was lost, he would take his place in the altar and say, "Pick me, God." In prayer meeting I'd get to saying that with all my heart, "Pick me, God." Not that I thought I'd be worth picking or anything, but I needed help - I needed God. Bro. Greg came to me and told me that God told him that He was going to save me. Boy, that felt good and I rejoiced over that. But I got up the next morning and I was still lost. IF God don't do it, I don't care who it is or how much you love them or respect them, it's not in man's hands. People can do anything and say anything but boy, if you're lost, you're lost.

Then God quit talking to me. He had been talking to me, telling me things, and then He just stopped. I got real down and talked to Bro. Greg. I felt like God had just left me. Bro. Greg said, "That's good." I thought he misunderstood me so I said, "you don't understand - God's left me - He's not saying anything." Bro. Greg told me that God has to take me out in dry places, in desert places so I'd want Him. I got in really bad shape. Jamie had given me a little silver button that said "Hope" and I'd put it on every day. One morning I got up, August 2nd, 1998. The church had been to Mississippi Delta Camp Meeting. Cheryl was in Kentucky but I got up to go to church and put my button on. I had no hope and thought the church people were going to be tired from Camp meeting. But I just got up to go through the ritual. That morning, Bro. Tim was there. I saw his trailer and got so excited that he was there. During Sunday school, Bro. Tim sang "Mercy and Grace" three or four times and God was there that morning. He preached out of Isaiah 45. I don't remember a whole lot because I was under conviction. But I do remember he would say, "Come, let us reason together." I though in my little pea-brain that I could come and reason with God or something. When he got to the end of Isaiah 45 he said "let all that are incensed against Him be ashamed." When he said that, it just cut my heart out because I knew I had been mad at God. I was really in bad shape. I remember going up front - I couldn't see where I was going. I would find a window and take a few steps and find another window. I turned the corner and saw Bro. Greg and told him "I'm so tired - I need God to forgive me." He told me to just get down there and asked Him - that He might do that. I knelt down there and was praying with all my heart, "God just forgive me" and I was just praying for another chance, that God would make the playing field level and give me another chance. I asked God to please forgive me for being mad at him and for what I was. All of a sudden it was just like I was pressed up against a wall and the wall give way, just "poomp". The heaviness was gone, there wasn't anything on me. I just laid there for a little while and I couldn't find nothing on me. It was like I had been in a busy, noisy place and had jumped in a swimming pool. It was just all quiet - It was nothing. I laid there and thought, "Golly, I think God might have just saved me." He even had to put that thought in my mind. I thought about it and I couldn't find any heaviness, nothing there but a peace that I could never explain. Then I did a

crazy thing, at least for me. I started laughing and said, "I think I just got saved!" I don't know what time it was then but I know at 2:30 they were dancing in the aisle! That was the day that a miracle happened.

You can say you're lost but a lot of you it's just "word only" because if you ever really get lost, you'll be ready to do business with God. You won't be complacent - you'll seek God with all your heart. When you know that you're lost and God shows you who you are and you see yourself before a holy God, condemned, and see who you are, you'll seek Him. And, I want to tell you, God is real. I never knew God could be so real and so intimate and so loving. He loves you this morning and when you decide that you need Him with ALL of your heart, you'll find Him.

All I do know is that He came into the world to sinners, of whom I am chief.

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