

It is Finished

Personal testimony
of Leslie Lubiatowski

Saved July 9, 2001

Godly sorrow; repentance; salvation; these are words I never heard growing up Catholic, and I never knew I needed them. My family went to church every Sunday and we observed all of the “holy days.” I was taught about Jesus and his death and resurrection. I believed in God, and I feared him. But as far back as I can remember, my heart yearned for something more. I just never knew what it was.

I was what you’d call a “good girl” for most of my childhood. Then came high school. There were so many cliques and I didn’t seem to fit in any of them. I’m ashamed to say that I finally found a place where I could fit and I hooked up with the party crowd. They had little or no expectations, seemed to accept everybody, and the only thing you had to do to belong was to do what they did. That was the biggest mistake of my life. For many, many years, the party never ended. It became my way of life. It was my answer for a good time, my escape from the hard times, and the only way I spent my time.

In 1991, my mom died of cancer. She had been sick for almost 2 years and it was one of the hardest things I’ve ever watched and the greatest heartache of my life. I was 24 years old then. I turned to the only thing I knew, but drinking wasn’t enough anymore and I took that lifestyle a little bit further and tried other things.

I wandered around in that pit for a long, long time. I pushed away my family and kept friends at a distance. I thought if I just didn’t let anyone else get close, then I wouldn’t ever have to hurt that way again. Somehow, I knew I needed help from God, so I kept going to the Catholic church because it was the only church I had ever known.

Sometime around 1996 or 1997, my sister started going to a Baptist church. After a lot of asking on her part, I finally gave in and told her I’d go with her.

It was a lot different than the Catholic church. I started to believe some of the stuff I was hearing and started to attend church pretty regularly. I didn’t even try to change my lifestyle at first, but I didn’t want “those people” to know what I did. One day, I decided to get saved. I repeated a prayer just like they told me and got baptized. For the most part, I never told anyone I “got saved” and I never thought too much about it other than the preacher told me this meant my sins were forgiven and I was a Christian and on my way to heaven. I never acted any different, I never thought any different, and I quite literally believed that salvation was in the words that I said. I just carried on with life as usual.

God didn’t leave me there for long. In August of 1998, some friends of ours invited my sister to a camp meeting at a church in Oregon, Ohio. I had plans that night and didn’t want to go. Who was I kidding? I had “plans” every night. She invited me every night and I said no every night. Then, late in the week, she came home and told me one of our friends got saved. I thought he was already saved??? I started getting curious and I can remember thinking, how could anyone not repeat a prayer right? How do you mess that up? So I decided I would have to go find out what was going on.

The very moment the car turned onto that gravel driveway, I was squirming in my seat. I didn’t know what was wrong. I hadn’t even stepped out of the car yet and I already knew this place was different and I didn’t “fit in.” The first thing I noticed was Pastor Rutherford. He was just so genuinely happy about God. I’d never seen anything like it before. It made me even more curious; curious enough to go the next night. That was the first time I ever heard Brother Tim Rutherford preach. I knew before I left that night that I wasn’t really saved. It wasn’t a big shock to me. Just a quiet realization that

salvation wasn't in repeating a prayer. It seemed to make a lot more sense. That whole repeat a prayer thing always seemed more to me like I said the pledge of allegiance than a work of God. I was glad there was more to it and maybe even felt a little relieved, but I had no idea the things I was about to learn.

One of the first times I went to a regular service there, I heard Pastor Rutherford's testimony. He lived a life a lot like mine, and he said that God saved him. Maybe God would do that for me. It made me want to hear more.

Even though I knew that I wasn't saved, I didn't know what it meant to be lost. These next two years I spent learning about God and his ways. One of the things I struggled with a lot was the fact that so many people in my life had died and they were all Catholic. Being raised in a Catholic church all my life, I knew I had never heard enough truth to ever get saved. Even though my heart knew I was hearing the truth, I fought it because I thought that if I let myself believe, then I also had to believe that all those people, including my mother, had gone to hell. I talked to Pastor Rutherford about that and he asked me a question. He asked, "Did your mom love you?" I told him yes. He asked if I was sure. I got a little mad that he would ask me like that and I very confidently told him "Yes." Then he said this, "If your mom loved you like you say she did, and even if her soul is in hell at this very moment, would she want that same fate for you or would she want you to find the truth?" The answer to that question was obvious to me. She would have wanted me to find the truth. I never struggled with that again. We talked about some other things that day and although I did get some help, I didn't get saved.

A lot of things in my life started changing. Secular music really had a hold on me and I threw out all my tapes and stopped listening to it. I became very conscious of how I dressed and the language I used. I started reading sermon after sermon from Charles Spurgeon. I tried so hard to quit partying but I just could not seem to get that out of my life. If only I could stop sinning, maybe God would save me. Somewhere, I had gotten the idea that if repentance meant "turning from sin," that meant I had to quit sinning. I didn't realize it was a work of God.

At night, I would get really afraid. I would lie in bed and think about dying and thoughts of hell would torment me. I was so afraid that the devil could get his hands on me that I started playing preaching tapes at night so I could fall asleep. I thought if a man of God was preaching in my room, it would keep the devil away. I did this every single night for the next couple of years.

At the 2000 Camp Meeting, I finally understood what it meant to be lost. And I was really, really lost. On Tuesday night, Brother Jim Grapp preached about Zacchaeus and how "he sought to see Jesus, who he was; but he could not for the press, because he was little of stature. So he climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him; for he was to pass by that way." Brother Jim said that if you're lost, and you can't get saved, it's because you can't see Jesus, and if you want to see Jesus, you have to get in the way. And that way is good Bible preaching. I was crying and wondering if this message was for me when Brother Jim pointed right at me and said, "If you're sitting there wondering if this message is for you, then it probably is!" I cried through that entire message but didn't fully understand until much later the significance of what he was preaching.

The next night, Brother Tim Rutherford preached Isaiah 41:17 - When the poor and needy seek water, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

All I could do was cry through that message too. I talked to Brother Tim for a long time that night. He asked me if I wanted God more than anything else in my life. That's not the first time I had been asked that question and I had always given the answer I knew I should give and said yes. But this time, I remembered something I heard someone preach, "You have got to get honest with yourself and you have got to get honest with God." I just couldn't keep lying. I told Brother Tim the truth that night. I didn't want God more than anything. Oh, I wanted to want him with all my heart, but I didn't. I didn't want God and I didn't know how to make myself want God when I didn't. How do you make yourself want something you just don't want? I knew what waited for me if I didn't have God. How could I be so stupid not to want him? But knowing that didn't change the facts. I wanted my life more than God and felt powerless to change it. Brother Tim told me that night that I had nothing in me that could make me want God. He said that I needed faith and it wasn't something I could just muster up in myself. God created it and God would give it to me. That night, God gave me so much hope. It was such a relief to know I didn't have to do this all myself.

I still struggled with letting go of the world. I hated myself and hated everything about the life I was living. One day, I knelt down next to my couch. I was angry with God about the lifestyle I felt so stuck in and what I later realized was the conviction I felt about it and I started to tell God how I felt. I asked him why he was doing this to me. Why did he have to open my eyes to all this? Why do my friends get to go out and party and enjoy it, but I'm so full of guilt I can't even have fun anymore. If he wasn't saving me, then why didn't he just leave me alone so I could enjoy that life just like everybody else? I heard God louder than I've ever heard him before. And He said, "Because I love you."

These next several months brought a lot of turmoil. My worldly friends thought I was "depressed" and no fun to be around. Everyone at church would ask me "what's going on with you spiritually? Where are you with God?" I was lost, that's where I was. And it may sound crazy, but I thought I was good at it. I was beginning to feel very comfortable as "the lost one" at church. I started to use my lostness as a license to sin. My thinking was, "well I'm lost, I'm supposed to sin." So I went about it with gusto. Getting saved really scared me. That moment when I would meet God, knowing that as I was looking at Him, He was looking at me and seeing all that I was, absolutely terrified me. I just knew I would be a failure as a Christian. At the same time, I hated the life I was living and no matter how hard I tried I couldn't seem to change. Sometimes I didn't even want to try. It was pure misery. But God kept loving me and drawing me and showing me who I was. Then one day, I was hanging out with my friends, and it was like God pointed at the glass in front of me and said, "That isn't the sin, YOU ARE." It was me. Sin was who I was, not what I was doing.

Not long after that, Pastor Rutherford preached a message from Luke 15:4 "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it." I didn't hear a word he preached that night, just that verse. I stared at it the entire time he was preaching, wondering if that meant Jesus was looking for me? For the next 2 weeks I kept reading that verse over and over. Finally, I took my Bible and went to Pastor Rutherford after a service and I told him that I knew I was supposed to seek God but it seemed like I messed everything up, including that, and then I asked him if this verse meant Jesus was looking for me. He said, "Yes." And then he asked me, "How long does it say he'll look for you?" I can still see his finger pointing to those last four words. My eyes filled with tears and I said, "Until he finds me." That is the first time I ever believed that someday God would save me. Because I knew this much, if Jesus was the one looking for me, he would never fail.

Some time after this, our church split. A lot of people just up and left, but some stuck around long enough to try to persuade others to leave. They cornered me one night after the service and tried to tell me that there were things I needed to know about my pastor. I remember getting so angry with them and I told them, "I finally believe that God will save me and you want me to leave?" After my sister and I got back to our apartment that night I was (verbally) venting my anger. I was walking upstairs to my bedroom and I stopped and told her, "Who do they think they are? How can they say things about Pastor Rutherford? Every time he stands up to preach and every step he takes, he tells them who he is, and they don't believe him. If that's salvation, then I don't want it." I took about three more steps and I heard God say those same words back to me. "Who do you think you are? Every day I tell you who I am and you don't believe me." I ran to my room and cried myself to sleep that night.

After the church split, a marvelous thing started to happen. You see, I was so busy watching other people to see what salvation was that I wasn't even looking for the one who was salvation. It was as though when these people left the church and I stopped looking at them, I started to see Jesus, who He was. I remembered what Brother Jim preached about Zacchaeus. I found my sycamore tree and I was going to stay right where I was until Jesus passed by.

I became more and more miserable as the days and weeks passed. All I could think about was the fact that I was lost and on a fast road to hell. I'd like to be able to tell you that I had stopped running around in the world but that seemed to be the one thing I could not conquer. I was out one night and there were just a few other people there. I looked up and saw a cockroach on the wall in front of us, right under a light. It just sat there for the longest time without moving. I thought that was odd and turned to my friend Chris and said, "Isn't that weird, usually if they're around any kind of life or light, they run right back to the dark." God spoke to me again that night. He told me I was that cockroach. He had shown me life and he had shown me light and I kept running back to the dark. I don't know what made God choose me sitting among people who were no different than I was. But for some reason God let his grace shine on me and he pulled me out.

Towards the middle of June 2001, I went to the altar during a service. My pastor's wife came up to me and asked me what I was doing at the altar. I told her I wanted God to save me. At one point, she asked me if I was worried about what my friends would think. I remember responding with a rather loud "NO!" I didn't realize until that very moment how much I didn't care what they thought. Then she said, "Did you ask God to save you?" Well, I hadn't. I was always so busy asking God to show me this and tell me that and I never even asked him to save me. Maybe that's what I was doing wrong. I didn't end up getting saved that day, but I determined that from now on, when I prayed I would ask God to save me first thing, so I wouldn't forget. But no matter how many times I asked, or how much I meant it, nothing happened. Asking had become a work for me.

A couple weeks later, I went to church on a Sunday morning. I felt like I had brought the devil to church with me that day. I felt filthy and unworthy to even be there. I don't think I heard a word that was preached. After the service, I got some tapes from the April meeting with Brother Tim and went home. I sat on the couch for hours that afternoon and cried, feeling miserable way down in my soul. My friend from the night before kept calling me and leaving messages on my answering machine. She wanted me to go somewhere with her that afternoon. After 3 or 4 calls, I finally got up and called her

back. I told her that I didn't want to go. She could tell I had been crying and asked what was wrong. I told her among other things that I couldn't keep living like that anymore. She didn't understand what I was talking about and I just started crying louder and kept saying, "I'm lost, don't you get it? I'm lost and I can't live like this anymore."

Eventually, I went to bed that night. But before I got in bed, I knelt down beside it and just started crying all over again. As what had become my ritual, the very first thing I did was ask God to save me. And then I just wept. I started to really see my life; I saw me. It was easy to see and hard to deny the physical sins that were so obvious to me and everyone around me. But that night, I could no longer deny the sin that no one else could see. It was time to get honest and face God with who I really was. As I cried out to God, I told him I was just a filthy pig and I knew He didn't have to save me if He didn't want to. I cried and cried, I begged and I pleaded. And I finally realized that there was nothing I could do. I couldn't convince God with my words and I couldn't make Him feel sorry for me. I just sat back on my heels, realizing that I couldn't even pray right. I have never felt so helpless in my life. I got up off the floor and crawled into bed. I put a tape in just like I had every night for the past two years. The preacher barely started talking and I felt God urging me to get out of bed and pray. I knelt down and as usual, I first asked God to save me. Then I just cried and begged God to have mercy on me. I got back into bed after a little while and put in a different tape. The same thing happened and so I got out of bed again to pray. I started out asking God to save me and then just cried and eventually got back into bed. This time, I put in a music tape of Brother Tim. It was about 1:00 a.m., July 9, 2001. I was just laying there listening to the music and thinking. About the 5th song in, Brother Tim started singing "He is I Am." I just laid there listening when somehow, it was as though I wasn't hearing Brother Tim anymore, and when he sang, "I am the Son of God" it was as if Jesus himself was telling me who He was. I gasped out loud and said "HE IS!" It took me a few minutes to realize that God had saved me. All that turmoil and hopelessness and the begging and pleading were just gone. I started laughing and crying at the same time. What amazes me the most is that I didn't even do anything. I just believed the Son of God and it was finished.

For more information, please contact

Lighthouse Baptist Church
11792 Douglas Street
Arlington, TN 38002
(901) 867-2009

www.lighthousebaptistarlington.org