



EPHESIANS:
Testimonies

IN HIM
I AM

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Know: There is no scripture reading today. Enjoy these testimonies of how these four different women learned to walk in righteousness and grace.

Laura's Testimony-

As a child, I came to believe the lie that God's love was conditional and that in order to go to heaven, I had to be pure and holy. Although I knew Jesus died for me and loved me, I thought that love was conditional. I wanted to do the right thing and make people and God happy, but I also felt a deep inadequacy that I would always be a sinner and disappoint God and other people.

I did everything I could not to sin, to be good, and to please God. Especially in college, I did all the Christian things (evangelism, bible studies, etc.). None of this ever made me feel more holy, but rather like there was more I had to do. This made me feel like I was living on a roller coaster of emotion and like God would keep asking for more.

It was not until I started questioning my beliefs concerning God's unconditional love for me. "Did I believe he loved me no matter what I did?" I realized I didn't believe this and began a journey to change what I thought about God and myself.

I still deal with lies today, but I truly believe God loves me no matter what. I got to this place by memorizing scriptures, reminding myself of this truth, speaking affirmations and scripture over myself, and allowing God to speak and show me his thoughts. This has allowed me to receive God's love and love for others.

Christina's Testimony-

I look a lot different now, but I used to wear men's clothes solely and was a part of the gay community. I was living my little butch life.

I also bound my breasts with a chest binder for years to add to the more masculine look. I thought that was what my life was. That is how I was going to be happy. I wasn't. I was severely depressed and suicidal.

Four years ago now, God changed my life forever.

I remember always being frustrated at Christians around me because their first assumption was that I chose same-sex attraction due to abuse. But that just wasn't my story; in my mind, I had always felt that way- that I was born that way. It was all I had ever felt.

God challenged that. When I started studying my Bible for myself and accepted His love and grace, I realized my true identity.

My identity wasn't who I had sex with, or what I wore, or even who I thought I was. My identity was and is Jesus. When I accepted that fully, it was a weird experience, honestly. My mindset completely shifted. Slowly, as I continued renewing my mind, other things started to change. God was very gentle and patient with me. Slowly I started to change my appearance and what I wore. No one made me do anything or told me what I should wear. It came voluntarily.

I remember talking to Jesus one day, and I heard this loud and clear. He said "I don't care about anything else, I all want is your heart. Just let me in and show you the desires I have for you. The end result is not for you to be straight but to accept the love I have for you." Knowing that was all he wanted softened my heart.

All this happened while I was in California at a place called Mercy Multiplied. When I came back after ten months, I met with Anna, and she was talking to me about resting in Jesus.

In Genesis 2:2-3 it says

"By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."

She explained that God rested on the seventh day and continued resting. Since He is in us and we are seated with Him, then we should also be rested in His finished work.

At that moment, I realized why it had felt so easy these past months back in San Antonio. I thought I was going to have to heavily guard myself and put myself in this jail mindset so I wouldn't go back to what I was. But those past few months, I had been fine.

It seemed suspicious; too easy. I was supposed to be struggling. Anna had put words to what I was already doing, but I didn't fully understand what that was. I was already resting; I had fully accepted and was walking in my identity in Christ. There was no striving.

And now, four years later, it's still easy. I have continued to grow, and God is still putting new desires in my heart.

Now, I want babies- at least five. I'm still coming around to marrying a man but I do know that it is a desire for my heart. I just have to strip off some more of those pesky daddy issues. But I have joy and happiness in where my life is now and what's to come.

The world tells you that to be truly happy, you need to do whatever you want and do whatever it takes to get there. But I know from experience that it is very empty. I was living how I thought I wanted to live and was utterly miserable. Now, I'm living for Jesus and am living free. Walking in true freedom from same-sex attraction, depression, anxiety, a bipolar diagnosis, gender confusion, suicidal attempts/ideation, sexual abuse, self-harm, paranoia, and many, many other things. I was a hot mess.

Now, I am a testament that Jesus can redeem anything and anybody.

Charis' Testimony-

I grew up with wonderful parents who loved the Lord, valued family, and were always in some type of ministry, mostly pastoring and missionary work.

They moved us to a small Hill Country town during my early elementary years to plant a church. This church planting season began a very difficult time in their lives as finances became very tight, and several injustices were also done to them. On top of that, my mom began to struggle with extreme anxiety (before anxiety was actually a thing). The anxiety carried on all five years of the church plant. Due to all of these challenges, some difficult family dynamics started.

As a result, I unknowingly developed an underlying belief that no one else would protect me from others and the pain others' words and responses inflicted on me. I had to protect myself! It led to a tough outer shell and the facade that I didn't need anyone and that anyone who messed with me would pay dearly. Any time anyone made me feel threatened (or more specifically, my self-worth threatened), I would put them in their place with my sharp tongue. My words were like a knife that would cut people and shut them down. I felt I always had to be on top of people that made me feel threatened, and the way I did that was with my words.

I'd always had a tender heart for Jesus, though. I was in church all the time and received most of my schooling in a Christian school. When I was 14, I began reading my Bible daily. So I knew well what the Word said about the power of the tongue and anger, but I was more interested in protecting myself than changing. I'm not sure I ever felt I needed to change or was doing anything wrong, as protection and control were my main priority.

The first time I remember being concerned about this issue with my mouth was in my 20s. I was reading Ephesians 4:29-32, which specifically spoke about not letting anything unwholesome

come out of your mouth but only what will give “grace to the hearer.” I remember wanting to change how I spoke to people when that verse hit home.

My name is the exact Greek word in the bible for the word “Grace” written in that verse. It created the desire to epitomize my name and for my character to change. After this, I began trying harder and memorizing verses for behavior management. I would see a little bit of victory here and there, but would find myself falling back into it when I stopped focusing so hard on it. There was no character change, it was just behavior management, which didn’t go very deep.

As I got into my 30’s I got more involved in ministry. I realized I couldn’t just fly off and let my mouth say whatever I thought. I knew I needed to control my tongue because that’s what “mature” Christians” did. So I learned to control my tongue and harsh words to people a little better, but that just resulted in more internal anger because I wasn’t letting it out on others as much. The way I would let out that anger that was still there was by sharing my frustrations about people with other people, mostly friends, and my husband. I would gossip about frustrating people and/or situations instead of being rude head-on. But, of course, I had spiritual excuses for my gossip. This was my way of coping with my anger and “getting it out” instead of tearing people down to their faces with my words or sarcasm.

Once again, there was no real character change, and while the behavior changed slightly, it still wasn’t behavior that befits a woman who has become the righteousness of God in Christ. I began realizing that the secret to the character transformation I was seeking lay in understanding my identity in Christ. Looking back, I realized I had known this for years and longed to understand it better. I would read Scriptures about my identity in Christ, but it just kind of bounced off.

In the Spring of 2020, I dove into a “Who I Am in Christ” Bible study. I was hungrier than ever to know it and for that transformation. I remember sitting in my Bible study spot in my room, wondering why I would read the verse and study the truth, but it didn’t sink in. It was as if I believed it with my head, but it didn’t penetrate my heart and become a true conviction of belief. I believed God meant it, but the power of the truth didn’t permeate my heart. Until the next year, that is.

In the Spring of 2021, I experienced tremendous disappointment with God. It was absolutely devastating to me. Through this disappointment and misunderstanding I had with God, He began to reveal to me areas that I didn’t truly trust Him. He showed me areas where I had a skewed opinion of His character and goodness. I remember hearing a line in a song at church shortly after He revealed these things to me. The line said, “I know I’m safe with you,” and in that moment, God told me, “You don’t feel safe with me.” And all I could do was agree with Him. I hadn’t realized it, but I didn’t always feel safe with Him. I would say I trusted God (because I was a good Christian, and that’s what we know we’re supposed to believe and say), but I was one who always had a backup plan on how to control things in case God didn’t come through the way I wanted. Somewhere along the lines, I had transferred that false belief that I had to protect myself into my relationship with God.

God gave me a vision of me floundering in a pool, and the God I thought Him to be sitting by watching me flounder while he sat back sipping a lemonade, telling me the floundering was good for me and that it would develop character. That was the view I had of God and I didn't even know it. Viewing God as that kind of God is what caused me not to be able to trust Him fully. As He began to heal my heart, He showed me how good a Father He truly is; One that is truly for me and my good, for my victory, and one who isn't harsh and hands-off, but a Father who is gentle, meek, and constantly working all things behind the scenes for my good.

He never left me to flounder alone. That's not who He is. I had interpreted things wrong and believed I couldn't quite trust Him because of it. The remarkable thing is that once I started healing and began to trust in His good character, all of a sudden, I could believe what He said about me. You can't really trust what a person says if you don't actually trust the person who says it. Because I struggled to believe that God was for me, I had a hard time receiving all these amazing promises and truths God said about me in Christ. I would see them and want to believe them, and, in a sense, I did in my head, but it never went past head knowledge.

As I learned to trust Him, those truths became not just head knowledge but heart knowledge and, eventually, a total conviction in my soul. When God says I am the righteousness of God in Christ, I began to believe I could live as I truly was- righteous. That is who I am. When He said I'm no longer a slave to sin, I realized I no longer had to respond to the fight or flight hormones that were released in my body when someone said something that threatened my self-worth or made me feel like a failure.

God's truth about me finally stopped bouncing off and began to work its way deep into my soul, and the result was that my mind and body began responding to the truth as well.

I'll never forget the day I was cut off in traffic by a reckless driver. Normally I would have been all over my horn, infuriated. And while that response was still my first thought, this logical thought penetrated my heart. "Why will I allow that person's crazy to destroy my peace? It's not going to do anything but raise my blood pressure. The only one hurt by allowing my natural response to call the shots is me." It's like, all of a sudden, I could think logically.

As the days and months went by, I had more internal conversations like that. A reality was setting in that I didn't HAVE to respond that way. Never in my life did I think I could get control of my angry responses, especially when I felt threatened. I was no longer a slave to my emotional and/or physiological responses. I had a choice as to how I would respond. I felt that if I chose to ignore someone's threat, I would, at the very least, be run over. But as the truth of who I now was in Christ saturated my soul, I saw the steady transformation, and it was like I barely even had to try.

If you struggle to believe what God says about you and/or don't find it transforming you, I would encourage you to ask God if there are areas in your life where you don't fully trust Him. Are

there lies or incorrect perceptions you have about His goodness and trustworthiness in your life? He is so good at revealing those if we ask. These kinds of revelations and transformations take time and are not usually instant. Because when it's a matter of trust, that is naturally built over time as you've witnessed someone's faithfulness and reliability.

Sometimes when we have a skewed view of God, we can't even see His faithfulness. So once you begin to see areas you've believed wrongly about God, He will heal, and you will begin to regain that trust, as now, in your healed state, you're able to see His faithfulness much clearer because your vision has been cleared by the healing. Then, once you can begin trusting the Lord more and more, the truths of who you are in Christ will be able to take root and bring about their natural transformation in your heart and life.

Jaime's Testimony-

Over the past couple of years, the Lord has changed my heart as my view of Him has changed. It began when I read a book called Unveiling Jesus by Tricia Gunn and discovered true Grace (Jesus). I realized that God wasn't mad at me; He wasn't withholding His goodness from me; as Jesus is, so am I. There's nothing I need to "do" to add to that relationship. Nothing to earn, nothing to prove to Him.

Then the concept of rest came a year ago, sitting with Jesus. This Ephesians study has continued the discovery of God's love for me.

I recently had some revelations and personal victories over a lifelong struggle with fear and anxiety. Living loved by God has changed how I believe and react to things in my life, and I'm experiencing freedom I'd only dreamed I could!

Ever since I can remember, I've struggled with fear and fearful thoughts. As a child, I'd lay in bed at night worrying about possible painful things to come. What if my parents die before me? What if a serial killer breaks in and takes me? If I heard of some scary occurrence anywhere to anyone, I somehow internalized that it was possible it could happen to me or someone I loved.

I prayed with my Grandmother and gave my heart to Jesus when I was about three years old. My childhood was marked by instability. Both of my parents were drug addicts, so I was exposed and affected by lots of scary things at a young age. I knew God was with me, sometimes I could even picture him beside me, especially as I faced hard things. When I struggled, I knew who to ask for protection and peace, but I still struggled with lots of fear.

In my early 20's, one of those deep fears was realized. Despite praying with all of my heart for her healing, my young mother died in front of me of a sudden massive heart attack. She was only 45 years old. Her life was a rough one marked by alcoholism and drug use, and we were

separated for most of it. A few years before her death, she came to visit me in TX and gave her life to Jesus during her visit. Afterward, she moved to San Antonio, and the Lord did an amazing, transforming work in her. She flourished in the love of God, and our relationship was completely redeemed. So, losing her was especially hard. Just like when I was a child, I knew God was with me, but I couldn't understand why He didn't heal my mom.

I reconciled that He knew better than me. I guessed He wanted to teach me through the suffering. I thought God was generally good, and I wouldn't dare say anything different, but in my heart, I doubted Him. Anytime life would rub against me or adversity would happen, I felt like I had to do my part to care for myself and those I love. I found myself always looking out on guard and feeling like I had to project danger so I could be prepared to act if God didn't do His part.

I didn't realize it then, but lies had been formed in my heart about God because of the disappointments and pain I'd experienced. I didn't trust him fully, although I couldn't admit that. So, while I never said things out loud that aligned with that fear and doubt, I behaved from that belief. I tried my best to be as good as I could. I didn't willfully sin; I served in the church and loved and encouraged others. If I experienced disappointment or pain, it wouldn't be because God had a reason to judge me.

These beliefs manifested trouble in my life. I became paranoid about germs and sickness. I was always afraid someone I loved would die. As a young mother, I was so nervous. I was scared my babies would die in their sleep, so each time I'd bring one home from the hospital, I'd stay awake for weeks, watching them sleep. It caused trouble in my marriage.

My husband has worked in sales all of our married life. We've had plenty at times; others were financially tight, but God has always provided for us. He had always been good, but even during good times, I'd find myself prophesying trouble. What if my husband lost his job? We don't have enough savings. We will never be able to retire. In my thought life, I was a pessimist. I didn't realize it.

So much has changed in me. I've moved from being emotionally tossed around by life circumstances to being rooted in God's love and peace. I've faced some familiar circumstances lately, but my responses have changed.

Recently, my husband was facing a job change. This alone would have sent me into survival mode in the past, but this time, I made a choice. I chose to surrender the burden to the Lord and not go into survival mode. I chose not to allow my mind to think of how I'd solve it if the Lord didn't provide like I thought He should. Instead, I rest and allow Him to show us his love. Within hours of us praying about it, my husband received a job offer. Then he received two more. He had choices. I had peace about one, he had peace about another, but I chose again to surrender. I felt like my husband could be making a mistake in his chosen one, but I surrendered and trusted him instead of wearing him down to get my way. My thoughts changed. Even if this job choice was a mistake, God loves us; He won't be angry and withhold good from us. That doesn't align with His character.

That germ-a-phobic no longer exists, either. Recently, many of my family members came down with a bad flu and had to go to the hospital. I never panicked. I was able to take authority over all of the fearful thoughts and what-ifs, speak life, and be a caregiver who wasn't riddled with anxiety and fear. I sat in a jam-packed ER *full* of sick people, and instead of having a panic attack and worrying about getting sick, I asked the Lord to give me someone to love on and pray for. He did, and the fruit of that was so beautiful. She encountered God that day through me, and I encountered Him too- He gave me peace and the empowering love that boldly gives out unafraid of being hurt or disappointed.

The peace I walk in now is evidence of my surrender to God and viewing Him rightly. I still have negative thoughts and bad days where I "feel" anxious, afraid, and unworthy, but the difference is that I don't stay there. I quickly remind myself that God is for and with me. I'm seated with him in Heavenly places. My feelings don't rule me any longer. The negative thoughts aren't his thoughts. I'm grounded in His love like Paul talks about in Ephesians 3. Instead of projecting trouble and disappointment, I project His goodness, transforming me from glory to glory.

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor 3:18)