

## **My Life Story – Rick** (January 2015)

Growing up I had what many would consider a “normal” childhood. I tried to obey my parents. I didn’t swear, shoplift or do drugs. Up until the age of eleven my family attended church most Sundays when we stopped attending. I had little or nothing to do with the church or spiritual matters until grade 10 when I picked up a list of recommended books for Grade 10 students. The list contained many great works of English literature including the Bible. And so, desiring to be a well-read person, I found my mother’s King James Version Bible on the shelf at home and began to read it.

As a teen I began to be conscious of a feeling of emptiness deep in my heart – that there was “something more” in life. I came to realize that this missing dimension was spiritual in nature. Through my reading of the Bible I began to grow more conscious that there is a God and that He is completely pure and righteous - and that I was not pure or righteous.

After graduating from High School in Kelowna, I moved to Burnaby and attended college in New Westminster, majoring in music. I worked very hard on my studies and was known as “the straight-A student.” However, underneath my hard-working outward appearance was a growing sense of guilt before God. I was conscious of having offended this completely righteous God by my actions. I lacked inner peace and often felt miserable - to the point of being broken before God. For some time I searched for peace with God – my conscience was increasingly burdened with guilt. My "solution" was to try harder to live a righteous and pure life (as the Bible defined it), believing that by doing so I would be accepted by God - but I constantly failed.

At that time I was living at my Grandmother’s house. One day in March of 1976 I came home and found a magazine in the mail slot. It was addressed to a previous owner of the house. It looked like a religious magazine – it contained articles about Jesus and the Bible. I read the magazine with great interest.

One of the articles in the magazine explained why Jesus died on the Cross. I had heard the story of Jesus before – as a child I remember a sermon my uncle gave at church in which he explained that Jesus died for our sins. But as I read this article it became very clear to me that He died for my sins and that I needed personally to trust in Him to save me from sin’s penalty.

It was like the article had been written just for me! I realized for the first time that I didn’t need to try to earn God’s approval but simply receive His free gift of forgiveness and righteousness. I trusted in Jesus to rescue me from my sins and be the Master of my life. I met Jesus in a real and personal way and put my trust in Him to save me. I believed that Jesus is the only way to God (John 14:6).

Suddenly all my guilt was gone. It was like a heavy weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I felt a peace in my heart that I had never experienced before - my

life was completely changed. I was able to overcome temptations I had no power to resist before.

Although God had completely changed my life that day I needed to grow spiritually. As a new believer I did not know any other followers of Jesus. Without spiritual direction, my big question was, "Now what?" Owing to this, I made some foolish choices and began to give into temptations. I allowed myself to become deceived by false beliefs I picked up in one of my college courses.

Soon after this I met a young woman (a follower of Jesus) who introduced me to a Bible-teaching church where I began to grow spiritually. Carol would later become my wife. I met other followers of Jesus there who encouraged me in my relationship with Jesus. Carol and I were married in 1980 and we began to serve God together out of gratitude for what He had done for us. God gave me a desire to give financially to share his good news and help people in need.

As a young man I read a book by J.C. Ryle called "The Call to Holiness." The book was based on a verse in the New Testament – "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). After I finished reading the book I made a commitment to pursue living a righteous and pure life out of respect for God.

This commitment was reinforced when I listened to a talk given by the campus pastor of a local Bible college. He challenged the audience to memorize sections of the Bible. He said that by doing this we would receive God's power to resist temptation and live a righteous life. I sensed that God was speaking to me through this man and began to memorize Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (recorded in the book of Matthew chapters 5-7).

I take no pride in the fact that I memorized three chapters of the Bible. Instead I want to boast in God for what He did through His Word in my life. As I memorized this passage I was amazed how specific passages from the Sermon on the Mount came to mind when I was tempted. Jesus was speaking to me through His Word and helping me to make choices that honored Him. He gave me new strength to live a pure life for his glory. I no longer faced temptations in my own strength – but in the strength God provided.

As I write this today I do not claim to be perfect – I continue to "mess up" in big and small ways. I often need to seek forgiveness from people and fresh cleansing from God. Through His Word (the Bible) God continues to challenge me to take steps of faith and obedience to Him. But I can confidently say to you today that "I am what I am by the grace of God" (1 Corinthians 15:10). I can take no credit for the person I have become. All the praise goes to Jesus Christ for forgiving me and changing my life by His power!