

Currie Tilley- Personal Testimony

As I look back over my life, I cannot help but praise God for where I am today. I was born in 1963 and spent the first 35 years physically alive but spiritually dead. Faith has always been an important part of my life, but it was misplaced until May of 1998.

I grew up going to church, but my family's attendance was inconsistent. I always felt that I was going to heaven because I jumped through all the hoops that were required. I joined a church and enjoyed serving others through my middle school and high school years. I was a relatively good person that did not do all those terrible things that other people did, so I felt that God would look favorably on me. My idea of salvation was based totally on my own works.

My middle school and high school years were very difficult because of my home life. My father began to suffer the effects of bipolar disorder and compounded the problem with alcohol abuse. He became verbally and physically abusive and ended up in jail on multiple occasions. Sports became a god to me at this point in my life. I found comfort and release as I devoted myself to sports and my youth group at church.

I started attending UNC-Chapel Hill in 1981. I was living to please myself at this point, leading the lifestyle of personal satisfaction. I had no desire to go to church. I only acknowledged God on my terms when I felt I needed Him. My father had lost everything at this point- job, family, home, and my respect. He had nowhere to go and ended up at the Durham (NC) Rescue Mission. It was at this point when my father lost everything in a worldly sense that he gained everything in a spiritual sense. He surrendered his life to Jesus Christ and the change was dramatic. My father never took another drink. His attitude and actions were those of a new man. He would continue to struggle with bipolar disorder and many physical ailments including diabetes and Parkinson's disease until his death in 2005. After his conversion, my father began to witness to me about what Christ had done in his life and what He could do for me, but I had no desire to listen to what he had to say. I realize now that he was planting seeds that God would later use in my life. I continued to live for myself at this point and my desire was to graduate from college and get a good paying job.

I was working my way through college and had to take some time off to earn enough money to finish school. In 1986 I met Suzanne Mathewson and in August 1987 we were married. Within two months, we were expecting our first child and I had not yet finished school. I realized that I had to finish soon or it may never happen. I went back to school and earned my BA in July of 1988. Our daughter Logan was born later that month. Over the next few years, I began to climb the corporate ladder. Our son Matthew was born in 1990 and I was living the life of a devoted husband and father. My desire was to provide for my family by working hard and making more money. I found a certain level of satisfaction, but I knew that something was missing. My wife and I decided to check out some churches, mainly because we thought that was appropriate now that we had children. We would visit churches as we moved around and attend when we felt like it. We continued to go through the motions for the next several years.

Life changed dramatically in 1998. We found a church we liked and began to get more involved. We attended a class with other people who had questions about faith. I had a works-based understanding of salvation and I believed that God would accept any "good" person who was sincere, no matter what belief system they held. When I expressed my opinion, the class leader's response was direct and to the point: "The only way I know to answer your question is by what Jesus had to say as recorded in John 14:6- 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" My wife and I had some very serious conversations over the next few days. As the Holy Spirit awakened and drew us, we both came to the realization that what we had been missing all this time was not about religion, but about who Jesus was and what He had done for us. We realized that there was nothing we could do for ourselves to merit salvation, but that God had already completed the work that needed to be done. We turned from faith in ourselves to faith in Christ alone in May of 1998. I was 35 and my wife was 30 and we were in our 10th year of marriage.

It is amazing how things changed after we surrendered our lives to Christ. We started to see things differently as our priorities changed. We were living in a 3500 square foot farmhouse that we had spent over a year renovating. My grandfather had helped build the house and my father was born there in 1939. We put blood, sweat, and tears into that house and believed that we had found the place to put down our roots. God, however, had other plans.

There were two old apple trees on the property that had become overgrown by a variety of vines and weeds. We found out that my grandmother used to make the best apple pies from the fruit of those trees. At this point, however, they were no longer producing fruit. My wife and I worked for two days to remove the things that were choking the life out of those trees. When we finished, the trees not only looked better, they began to produce fruit again the next year. God showed us that the same thing needed to be done in our lives. Living for the things of the world would keep us from producing the fruit that He desired. He needed to do some weeding and pruning. In 1999, we started to attend Ebenezer Baptist Church in Durham. We got plugged in at the church and began to serve. During this time, God began to call me into full-time vocational ministry. I wrestled with this call for several months. I didn't understand why God would call someone that had been saved for less than a year and that was in their mid-30's. I remember walking into the house and hearing a comment from a preacher on a Christian radio station: "Why did Jesus begin his public ministry when he did and not earlier? What was He doing during those adult years that the Bible does not speak of? Maybe He was experiencing life and this was God's perfect timing and will." I realized that it was not "late in life" for me, but it was God's perfect timing. He allowed me to go through life's experiences so that He could use me and my past for His purposes from that point forward.

I surrendered to the call late in 1999, we put the house on the market early in 2000, and I started seminary in the summer of that year. There seemed to be a lot of loose ends about where we were headed, but we stepped out in faith knowing that God would reveal things in His time and in His way. Everything came together in July, right before I was to start school full-time. The house sold, we moved to Wake Forest, and the church we were attending called me to serve as part-time Children's Pastor. Going from a large farmhouse with several buildings on the property to an apartment less than one-third the size was quite a change! We sold or gave away many possessions, placed our pets in other homes, and cut away the "vines" that we felt would keep us from producing the fruit that God desired.

God was faithful as He guided and provided during my seminary years. The money from the sale of the house paid for the education. My wife was able to stay at home with our two children as I worked part-time for two years, then full-time during my third year of school. I was ordained and called full-time at Ebenezer Baptist Church in May of 2003. We moved back to Durham and I continued in my role as Associate Pastor, with specific responsibilities in ministering to children and their families and developing the equipping ministry at the church. I continued serving there until March of 2008, taking on increasing responsibility and leadership in various areas of the church.

I received the degree of Doctor of Education from Southeastern Seminary in December 2010, a journey that prepared me to teach others who were following the call of God on their lives. My wife and I moved to Pennsylvania in September 2011 and I served as the Associate Dean for Masters Studies at Lancaster Bible College. In August of 2013 God directed us back to Durham where I served as Family & Discipleship Pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church, then as Pastor of Discipleship and Mission at Rebuild Fellowship, a multi-ethnic, multi-generational church plant in downtown Durham. I continue to teach as an Adjunct Professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in NC and Capital Seminary in PA and MD.

I am truly amazed and humbled by how God has worked and is continuing to work in my life. I have been blessed and am enjoying this journey of faith. I look forward to the next steps as I continue to follow the Lord's direction in my life.