

Almost...

*But
Lost*

HOW GOD
SAVED A
PASTOR'S
WIFE

Carolyn Reno



ALMOST. . . but LOST!

My earliest memories of the Lord's dealings with me center largely around times of special services, or "Revival Meetings," held in the church which my family attended. Though we were occasionally reminded that "the church doors are always open," as far as a public invitation was concerned, I soon realized (and privately rejoiced) that except for these isolated times of nightly services, I would not have to fight myself and the Lord to keep from "going down front." These were the only times that an invitation, as such, was given.

Even as a youngster, pride and a sort of false bravado were much a part of my concept of my own spiritual condition. Once, while walking home from church with an older brother, I recall making an effort to be light and airy when telling him that after all there wasn't too much to this business of "becoming a Christian" anyway . . . just walk up front after the service, tell the minister you want to be a Christian, answer "yes" to his questions, get baptized at the next opportunity, and that was pretty much it. Of course, you would want to be a member of the church and go to Communion too. With a grown—up seriousness, he quietly assured me, that that was not all there was to it — there was much, much more!

Several times I recall making an inward countdown as to the number of services to go before the "Revival" would close. Then things would get "back to normal" at the church and I could relax. A reluctance to be open and honest kept me from confiding in anyone, including my dear mother.

Decision at Age 9

One Sunday morning at the age of nine, I recall distinctly the battle that raged within me. After a verse or two of singing, I found that I not only could not, but no longer really wanted to hold out. Taking time only for a brief permissive nod from my mother, by whose side I was standing, I slipped out and up the aisle alone. Yes, I would take my place as one who did, indeed, want to be a Christian.

I remember little of the words spoken to the several of us who had stepped out that November day. There was a lightness in my chest though that I had not known for some time. In the service that evening I pondered as to whether the churning and struggling would return to me at invitation time. When I found that it didn't, I was pleasantly surprised and gratified.

In the days that followed, plans were made for my baptism. Mother had spoken briefly to me of the changed life that should accompany the walk of the new Christian, and in my typical know—it—all fashion I brushed it aside to cover the depth of my feeling.

The next couple of years passed quickly. While doing washing together in the basement, I was once questioned by a concerned older sister about my certainty regarding my spiritual condition. I hastily assured her that all was well, and wondered a little at her asking.

The summer between my sixth and seventh grades in school, my family moved some distance into the country on a small farm. Though at first it looked like this would necessitate a change of churches, our looking around brought no satisfaction. Therefore, it was decided to continue the long drive (about 25 miles one way) to our home church as often as possible. With chores, etc., many Sunday evenings the trip back into church was impossible. Mother looked around a bit and was glad to find a little country church nearby that still held evening services. Often she would go there, and I would reluctantly go along. I felt ashamed not to go, but was somewhat uncomfortable in these services. The folk were "different" in that they were more emotional, and their services, though not out of control, were certainly more lively than those to which I was accustomed.

Bible Memorization

A home Bible study that met weekly by rotation in several homes of our community opened up new areas of learning. I readily participated with other of the young folks who attended with their families and thoroughly enjoyed the Bible drills and quizzes. There were times when late at night with sleep far from me, I would ponder things I had learned, and tell the Lord that if I did not yet qualify for the Biblical term "believer believer," I wanted to.

With the encouragement for Bible memorization and a plan provided to earn certain rewards along the way, several of us in my family "hopped to it." At the end of the long road of a year's work (some 300± verses, I believe) lay the promise of a free week at a Christian camp or a leather-bound Scofield Bible. More than one Sunday afternoon was spent in seclusion . . . my younger brother in one part of the house and I in another, racing each other in the learning of a given passage. We learned isolated verses on a given subject as well as entire chapters, particularly from the

book of John.

Friends at school were largely of the group who either attended the evening Bible study, or like myself, were quiet — not part of the "in crowd" and not really wanting to participate in the worldly activities at school. As early as seventh grade I recall refusing an invitation to a school dance from an older boy, saying that I was a Christian and didn't dance. Word got around, and I was spared the agony of that sort of thing thereafter. I was convicted of not reaching my classmates with the Word at one time near the close of my high school days. With much fear and trepidation, a friend and I went to the principal to request permission for a Bible Club to be held at noon time or after school. Permission was denied.

Bible Club

My senior year of high school I was allowed to have a small children's Bible Club in the home of one of the families who regularly attended the weekly evening Bible study. Their home was in a little village near our farm, and it was an easy matter for those who attended from the immediate area to ride the school bus there after school, stay for Bible Club, and still walk home well before dark.

College Years

College loomed ahead. For several years I had dreaded much the time when I would have to leave home. Often I had known the overpowering feelings of homesickness and shyness. However, the Lord was gracious to me. My application to a nearby Christian liberal arts college was accepted, and though I would live in a dormitory, the short distance from home was a real comfort only about 20 miles — not even long distance to call. With a small scholarship, help from my parents, and a job on campus, my needs were going to be met.

For admittance to this college of my choice, all the students had to at least say they were saved and give some brief testimony thereto. Thus it was a bit unnerving to me when different ones in the dorm and around campus began to find they were lost and make new professions of salvation. In one particular case, I had thought the girl a bit wild myself and certainly in need of something. However, there were others who appeared to me to have been in good stead spiritually, but were finding they were anything but! Bearing a burden of sin and guilt myself, I had to admit that

the "joy of my salvation" was certainly lacking at times — and more often than not. This was true when I had just heard the Lord's soon and sure return preached. Pride and a sense of shame kept me from opening up with either of my roommates, but one warm spring day, no longer able to carry the load of doubt and fear alone, I went to one of the few freshmen girls I had confidence in and openly told her I was unsure of my salvation. She was more than a little surprised, but showed me a number of basic verses. Most of them I had memorized several years back. I readily admitted that I agreed with all of these and believed them to be true. Still I was considerably relieved for having aired my doubts and fears.

Engagement and Marriage

Pressures of studies were tremendous. I spent little time in social activities and dated only occasionally. Early in the fall of my junior year I became seriously interested in a fellow I had admired for quite some time. Spiritually he was someone to be looked up to. We had dated a little in high school and then several years had passed before we dated again. It was not long before I realized a little of the agony it would mean for me if the Lord did not give him to me. Sooner than I could have even hoped, he told me of his love for me. I took the matter very seriously seriously, and we didn't just automatically and quickly agree to a promise of marriage. I asked for a list of qualifications he wanted in his wife, and I still have the filing card on which he wrote: (1) Saved . . . and closed with (6) One that accepts the Bible as fact and a guide to life.

In February of our junior year we were engaged, and began to carefully plan our 70 + weeks (69 weeks plus an age of grace, we often said) of waiting. There was little security of a financial nature, but we didn't need it. A basic principle had been agreed upon and established between us — the Lord and His work must come first.

Close on the heels of college graduation came our long awaited wedding. The long engagement had been hard, but worth it. The first summer was difficult financially before the teaching job of the fall started, but wonderfully happy. Times when I would not be well or when I was overly tired, my young husband would slip out alone to church services, never letting me muddle his priorities. After just a year of marriage, the Lord saw fit to let us get started buying a house. It was near enough to the schools where we taught and to the church we had felt led to be joined to in fellowship and service. About this time our pastor felt led of the Lord to speak to my

husband about considering the possibility of the Lord's calling him into the ministry. Through college he had been assured of the Lord that he was not to plan his major with the ministry in mind, but now it seemed different. After time and prayer, he felt that the Lord was indeed changing our course, and would have him to be licensed by the local congregation. Soon he was made the assistant pastor of our church and assisted with visitation and such areas as were possible while still teaching. These were days of learning and getting experience in various areas.

The pastor of a sister church that was located about 90 miles south of us in the county died suddenly one Saturday night of a heart attack. My husband was asked to go down several times soon thereafter to preach for them on the Lord's Day, and even to consider whether the Lord might want him to take the church as pastor. Though willing, he had no direct leading to go at that time, but helped out now and then and prayed regularly for them to get a pastor.

As I look back, God moved particularly in our home church a couple of times, and these times were under the ministries of two different men of God. In each case I experienced some "travail of soul," and questioned again my own salvation and the lukewarm state of my Christian experience. For the first time, I confided my ups and downs, on—and—off—again state to my husband. He, though some perplexed, tried to help but knew better than to comfort me . . . leaving that to the Comforter God has provided. After God blessed our home with a baby daughter, I realized afresh I was no example for motherhood and worked much at establishing regularity in my quiet time. I learned firsthand how the devil is not above using a baby to interrupt such times of Bible study and prayer — when there is no possible physical explanation for her demanding cry.

Husband Begins to Pastor

Shortly after this time my husband and I realized the Lord was calling us to leave our pleasant little home, church, and loved ones to take the pastorate of the previously mentioned small country church. It meant a move, change of schools (for teaching would still be necessary in that the church could not support a pastor), and many less obvious adjustments for us. However, the Lord provided and enabled in each situation.

In the very first week after our move, I was to face the issue of whether or not I would be a hindrance to the Lord's using Paul freely. In the wee

hours of the morning the phone rang. One of our members was seriously ill — would the pastor please come? As the sound of his car faded into the night, I was sleepless. Living now where our nearest neighbor was barely within shouting distance (and not within sight), I felt very alone and frightened in our new home with only our sleeping infant daughter for company. The Lord confronted me then with the facts. If through my own loneliness or selfishness I made it hard for my husband to go anytime or anywhere he might be needed in this new pastorate, I would be anything but a help to him. We had been given this place of service from the Lord. Was I going to be a help or a hindrance? I dared not drag my feet or get in the way. This was the Lord's work, and far too important. Sleep came and with it a precedent was established for me.

Days of learning followed — many times the hard way. I was very conscious of my example before the church folk. A genuine love for "our people" grew and helped the time of discouragement and pressure that seem to be a part of any pastorate. I gradually found the frustrations that came from a feeling of being presumed upon or taken advantage of were my own fault. Often instead of performing a duty as "unto the Lord," it was done because I was the pastor's wife and "everyone expects me to do it."

Concern for the Lost

A concern for the cause of missions was one of the main thrusts of our early years there. When the Lord led us into the matter of sacrificial giving for missionaries, I didn't rebel in the least, but found real joy in seeing how He could provide anything He so chose to for us — from a much-needed suit for my husband to chewing gum for our little ones (the Lord had blessed us with a dear, second daughter just a little more than a year after going into the pastorate). Indeed, there were times when I felt it would be a sort of final proof of my love to the Lord if we were to go to some foreign field for missionary service.

As I saw and learned more and more of what the godly Christian life entailed, I wanted it. Faithfully I followed a schedule for reading my Bible through in a year's time, and was able to see it through to completion a couple of times during the next few years. Our own sin can never be atoned for by us, but as more of the inworkings of my own deceitful heart (Jeremiah 17:9) were exposed to me by the Holy Spirit, I was enabled to look at sin as God does — with a holy hatred. In many cases apologies were necessary, or attempts at restitution had to be made. My stubborn and proud spirit was

being dealt many blows. I tried to be grateful for this as I came to realize the necessity of it.

Being a part of our church visitation outreach out-reach was very difficult with my shy disposition. Seeing the Lord's strength as more than sufficient for any weakness really helped. A growing concern for the lost also helped. My awareness of the terrible plight of the lost and the imminent return of the Lord was sharpened keenly. Well do I remember times when I hated to go into town for groceries because the heedless crowds — looking, buying, laughing, seemingly blinded crowds — rushing down sidewalks were almost more than I could bear. At times I prayed earnestly for lost loved ones of "our people" and longed to see the Lord's dealing with them. My Sunday School class of young people grew and the Lord was gracious in dealing with many of them to one degree or another. Times when I was called upon to counsel one of the girls or ladies, the responsibility weighted heavily upon me.

Had No Assurance

Not only through my own husband's ministry, but also through the preaching of guest speakers, I was exposed to excellent and uncompromised presenting of the Word. More often than not, in the secret of my heart, I had little or no assurance of my own position before our righteous and holy God. So humbling it was to be gently reminded by the Holy Spirit, while nursing privately some personal hurt, that the Lord Jesus Himself had a right to such, if ever anyone did. Yet He did not stoop to any such thing — not to self pity, self defense, nor self reliance.

Many times despair threatened to engulf me. Here I was, the pastor's wife, and still uncertain of what Jesus had done in my heart. It was most difficult to recommend Him to others. I placed a card in the corner of my bedroom mirror on which I had written the fruit of the Spirit as given in Galatians 5. Some days as I faced that list, I was hard pressed to find even one of the evidences given there present in my heart and life!

There were times when the promise of John 6:37 brought comfort — " . . . him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Hadn't I come to Him back there at the age of nine? (I had long since realized that my subsequent attempts brought nothing new.) Still, one of the things that troubled me most was the fact that I could not reconcile some of the sin I had gotten into being permitted by God to go on at length uncorrected in the life of one

of His children.

For a long time my obedience to admonitions in the Word to "examine myself" were with reservation. I only wanted to see myself as "out of fellowship" — perhaps an immature believer or even disobedient, but certainly not . . . **LOST!**

I felt the fact that I was the pastor's wife made things especially hard. For example, how could I who attended every service and "did all the right things" tell whether or not I was doing them for the Lord because I loved Him, or because of my position and my not wanting to hinder my husband's ministry. I couldn't just drop everything and sit back for awhile to look at things objectively. In confiding to my husband he advised me to continue to search and wait on the Lord, but not to broadcast my doubts and misery lest much harm come to the cause of Christ — should I find that I was, indeed, one of God's own children under some sort of spiritual attack. At least once I thought, "To find out I am lost would so completely overwhelm me and cost me so much in terms of owning up to 'our people' — being re-baptized after my salvation (by my own husband?!) — and besides, whoever heard of a pastor's wife getting saved? I'll just have to take my chances!"

Further and faithful working in my heart by the Holy Spirit brought me past that — for which I praise His Name! After a series of special services when we saw the Lord work mightily in the church, I was lower than ever. In seeking to find the reality of my own spiritual condition — whether lost or saved — the picture was clouded by my "Christian life." Would a lost person live as I had, read the Word faithfully, pray, be genuinely concerned for the lost, ad infinitum? On the other hand, why the distress of soul, lack of chastening, and the absence of lasting peace (for there were short periods of peace now and then)? Several times I had tried a cop-out that went something like this: "Lord, if I'm not saved, please save me now," thinking in my heart that I could manage this thing privately. Since my outward life would go on much the same, I would be spared some of the difficulties that would face me if I had to "come clean." Daily routine was immeasurably burdensome. I longed only to be sure of my position in the Lord Jesus Christ. Joy in the little things — a child's smile, flowers in spring, a patient and loving husband — was gone.

Saving Faith

As the Lord would have it, Paul had to be away from home for a few

days to attend a conference. When he left, and each time he phoned back, my request was the same "Honey, don't quit praying for me!" (I knew that if I was lost the Lord would not have to hear me; therefore, I had confidence in his prayers being heard.) Having been so stubborn and often quenching the Spirit in former days, I feared greatly the possibility of His ceasing to work with me.

One afternoon, having put our little ones down for a nap, I sat down to search and seek. Nothing brought rest or peace. The presence of God was very real and awesome. I read the Word and then tried to pray. Then back to the Word. I was led to slip up to the study and there picked up a book by R. I. Humberd. There I read the account of the writer's giving up home and loved ones to take an offered place of ministry, thereby hoping to deserve the salvation Jesus offered. Early in this new work it was opened up to him that nothing we could ever do would make us deserving or right with God our Saviour. The Lord used this to open up the secrets of my own heart to me. I had been working, trying, doing, striving, and somehow hoping to attain the peace I knew I should enjoy in Jesus. These were all my works. Gradually I had "put on" more and more of the filthy rags of my own righteousness, all the while thinking that my lack of peace was due to not doing enough, not being burdened enough for others, not giving up enough, not reading or praying enough. If you had at anytime along the way asked me if I thought salvation was of works, I would have answered with a heated "NO!" However, the Lord revealed that I had lived a "YES!"

Dropping to my knees, I was enabled by the Holy Spirit to "look unto Jesus." At long last, I came to rest on Him and Him alone, trusting only in the finished work on Calvary to make me right with God. In a moment of time the work of years was swept away and I saw my need met in Jesus. Clearly I now understood how that I had dared not stop any of my praying, reading, etc., for I had nothing else, no one else, to depend upon. There was no longer the unrest about I John 5:12, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God **hath not life**," Here was the main crux of the whole life and death matter — had I been able to face my lack of the Son, I would have known my state long ago. Now I saw plainly why the promise of John 6:37 had not held true for me. I had not met the condition. I had not "come to HIM," but rather, as a child of nine I had only come to the place of wanting to be a Christian. Oh, the difference! No longer was I "almost," but altogether His!

Public Confession of Faith

Shortly thereafter I was able to confess my Lord openly before the church, sharing a little of how He had brought me to Himself after a matter of much struggle and repentance for sin. A couple of weeks later I was baptized as a picture of my salvation. Several years have passed, and more than ever I am convinced of my "lostness" all those years I "passed" for being saved. Oh reader, take time to search your own heart. Ask the Lord to help you be honest. Have you been to Jesus? Or was yours an experience that however good it seems, still falls short of complete and utter surrender to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Could you too be "almost . . . but lost?"

"My faith has found a resting place,
not in device nor creed.

I trust the ever living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.

I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,

It is enough that Jesus died,
and that He died for ME."

— Lidie H. Edmunds

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