

Wayne Mitschke

I was saved when I was five years old at Spring Creek Valley Baptist Church just outside of Tomball, Texas. I remember when I first realized I was what all the adults were calling a sinner. Our preacher, Vernon Ryder, was preaching a “fire and brimstone” sermon. I wasn’t what I would call a bad kid. But, I knew that I spent a fair amount of time getting into trouble, and, I knew that some of that trouble was justly earned. It isn’t like I looked for ways to sin, but, I sometimes made wrong decisions. I knew those decisions would have to be hidden, or, I would get in trouble. I loved Jesus, as I assume all five year old children do, but, Jesus was conceptually somewhere between “Santa Claus” and my dad. Jesus loved me, cared what happened to me and wanted me to make good decisions, but, he was making that list and I want to be on it. I realized that if I wasn’t on Santa’s list, I wouldn’t get a good gift. But, Brother Vernon had made it clear to me that if I wasn’t on Jesus’ list, I would “spend ETERNITY in HELL!!”. Getting a can of Play Dough instead of a bb gun or a guitar was acceptable, but, spending ETERNITY in a place where fire burns you all the time was definitely unacceptable. Still, weighing the embarrassment of walking up in front of everyone against the risk that I would die today, it seemed that I didn’t have to be in any hurry. However, one Sunday night, not too much later, made my mind up for me. Our church showed a film of how the Communists treated the Russian Christians after their takeover. There, I watched children having their eyes put out and pencils driven into their ears, and, that was the last straw. Finally, my fear outweighed my embarrassment, and I walked up in front of everyone and asked Jesus to come into my heart to save me from all those bad things.

As I grew older, I started thinking about my reason for becoming a Christian; fear. By the time I was 13, I gained a new understanding of Jesus. He was no longer a “Santa Dad”. He was someone who died for me. He took my place on the cross, knowing what kind of person I was and all the wrong decisions I would later make. My fear for my own skin gave way to gratitude. I felt like I had cheated my way into Heaven, and, began worrying my original conversion might not have even been real. After talking to my Dad, I rededicated my life to Jesus and asked Jesus to come into my heart a second time (just in case).

By the time I turned 17, I was very involved in the church. I sang in the adult choir, the youth choir and was involved in the youth program. I attended Sunday school and all the worship services. At the same time, I began singing in a country western band called The Ramblers. We would play weddings, family reunions and yes, dance halls and bars. I prided myself on not drinking even though the opportunity was made available to me often. I was commonly known as the designated driver. All my friends knew I didn’t drink and, aside from a few jibes now and then, they were fine with it. One Sunday, my pastor at FBC Brenham asked to speak with me after services. He had received “concerns” from some members of the congregation about my playing in a band. I found out the very people who had “concerns” had attended the dance I had played at. After talking with Brother Wheelus, he asked me how I felt about performing in the band. I told him that I didn’t see a problem with it. I acted in those bar halls no differently than I did in church. While I danced from time to time, I didn’t dance in such a way as to be an embarrassment to God. He was kind and cautioned me to be careful not to leave an opening for Satan to influence me. After I left, I felt betrayed. How could those hypocrites point a finger at me? I didn’t drink. I went to all the services. I sang in two choirs and participated in youth activities where they didn’t conflict with my gigs. It was then that I decided that while I need and want Jesus in my life, I wanted no part of hypocritical church members looking down their noses at me. From that time, I attended church sparingly and begrudgingly.

For almost 20 years, I went to church at Easter and Christmas only, and, I still felt justified. I lived a clean life and prayed from time to time. But, as time passed, I felt a pull to go back to church which was greatly influenced by my Dad’s urgings. The last part of my testimony may sound a bit dramatic, but, it is what it is. In 2004, I experienced my first kidney stone (cue melancholy music). When my kidney seized up (kind of like a charley horse), I went to the hospital for the first time in my life. I was in “big time” pain and Joann wasn’t used to seeing me like that and it scared her. Once again, my Dad approached me about getting back to church if for no other reason than to give Joann support outside of the family. With the guilt of not listening to God or my Dad mounting and the added guilt of leaving Joann without a church family, I decided to begin going back to church. We visited FBC Hempstead three or four times before joining in October. Each time we visited, I felt like Brother Danny had prepared that morning’s sermon just for me. I may have started out joining a church again just to alleviate my guilt and for Joann, but, I now love my church family. I enjoy attending and participating. I’m only sorry that it took 20 years for me to get back. I was not a bad person before I started going back to church, but, I am now a better person. I can feel God using me and growing me into the man He intended me to be. I have learned that it’s not about what I get out of church. Instead, it is about what I can give back to God through the church.