

## **My Salvation Testimony**

By Derrick Stokes

My testimony begins when I was about 9 years old. My church, at the time, had a pretty large children's ministry. One day the children's church pastor did an altar call. Although the details are foggy I do remember feeling somewhat compelled to join all the other kids going up to get saved. I almost remember the "compelled" feeling to be more like peer pressure. Well I joined my peers and if it was anything like it is all over America, I followed the familiar directions of "close your eyes, bow your heads, and repeat after me..."

From that point on, I considered myself saved. And truth be told, I might have been. At the age of 9, I hadn't lived a life that required much change. Nor would there have been much change in me after my conversion. I was respectful and polite and loved going to church. You could say I was your typical 9 year old church kid. I got in the normal kinds of trouble kids get into, acting up a little in school, lying about doing my homework so I can play. Things like that. I didn't think I was a bad kid.

As I grew up, I still considered myself saved. I went to church more than most of my peers and never got in any serious trouble. However, I began to live a life not worthy of the Gospel. Once I left the house and joined the military, I became promiscuous. Then, I began to drink heavily and often. Other than still going to church every now and then, the world had my heart. I knew right from wrong but in my heart I had no desire to repent.

In 2006, my enlistment in the military ended and I was hired to work at an OSB plant. My job was working in the wood-yard where I would spend 8 to 12 hours in a front-end loader. Just me a radio, a Gideon's New Testament, and an Our Daily Bread devotional that someone from a previous shift used to leave in there. My new job was also an hour away from home, the importance of which I'll discuss in a bit.

I began to read the devotional at work, just because it was there. You'll read anything when you're by yourself for that long. Then I would read the scripture for that day in the New Testament. The more I read, some of the scriptures I heard as a child came back to mind. This time, though, they had more life to them. They made more sense. They sparked my interest.

I also began listening to Christian radio. This really began ministering to me because the local Christian stations played more sermons and Christian talk-shows than music. So, there I was by myself for 8 to 12 hours a day, alone with a Bible, devotional, and Christian radio. The Spirit had been drawing me.

One day I remembered receiving a Christian hip-hop tape when I was a teenager from an older lady at church. So I decided for the hour long drive to and from work, I would

check the Christian book-store out for any newer music I might like for the ride. I was pointed to a cd called 13 Letters. Each song was a lyrical commentary on each of the Apostle Paul's epistles in the New Testament. Now I was equipped with music that taught me about the Bible on the way to and from work.

The hour long ride to work plus the 8 to 12 hour shift, plus the hour long ride home made for quite some private time for the Lord to speak to me through His word. However, one day at work, I turned off the radio and just had quiet time; meditating as I worked. That's when the Lord spoke to me and said "Your sins are forgiven." It was almost audible. At that moment I wept. The joy of being forgiven for my sins was too overwhelming to keep bottled inside. All that I had learned as a child became real to me at that very moment. I've told people that it was though all my life I had been living under a rock. While under this rock people told me about the sky and its color and vastness. I was told about the sky so much that I believed it...in my head. But this day the rock was removed and I finally experienced this Sky. That may sound cheesy but that's how it felt.

That was when I can truly say that I was born again. I don't remember the exact date other than it being sometime in 2007. That job was truly a blessing, if for no other reason, because it allowed that alone time that the Lord used to draw me closer to him. Even though I became saved that day I still fell and often. But my old sins didn't fit me the way they used to. I can say however that I have matured now in knowledge and in spirit. The world is no longer enticing. The old man is dead. I am a new creature drawn by the Father, born of the Spirit, and washed by the blood of Jesus Christ.