

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: “Christians are like the several flowers in a garden that have each of them the dew of Heaven, which being shaken with the wind, they let fall at each other's roots, whereby they are jointly nourished, and become nourishes of each other.” ~John Bunyan

GOD'S OPEN HEART SURGERY

“No! No! No!” I spat out the word in anger. “What part of the word “No” don’t you understand?” I’m not going to go to church with you now or EVER, and that’s final, so stop bugging me about it. That’s not my cup of tea! I don’t like church! I don’t like religion! I don’t like Christians, who are always preaching to you and acting like they’re better than you. They act like they know something you don’t; like they have a secret of sorts and you’re missing out. The joy, the peace and the smiles on their faces I see when I know their lives are in turmoil; it drive me crazy. I feel like they’re always trying to put something over on me. Besides, I like my life the way it is and I don’t like changes! ‘Hell could freeze over and I still wouldn’t go! I’M NOT GOING TO CHURCH WITH YOU! Final word! End of story!

“There!” I hissed through clenched teeth, as I slammed the phone down with a resounding bang! “That should discourage my husband’s relatives from inviting me to church ever again!” I probably won’t be the most favorite person in the family now, but I didn’t care.

Turning from the phone with a smirky smile on my face, I saw Joe, my husband, staring at me with utter shock on his face. “Who were you talking to? Don’t you think you went overboard in your response? They’re my family, remember, and I have to work with my uncles. You were really rude. That wasn’t a very nice way of saying no! Why did you act that way? That’s not like you to be so mean, so hateful!”

Ignoring the shocked, then hurt look on his face, I quickly defended myself. “I’m desperate! Your family doesn’t seem to know the meaning of the word “NO! They’re driving me crazy!” I replied as I marched out of the room; head held high with my inner walls up for added protection.

Did I feel bad about the conversation and my behavior the next day? Yes, I did, but I would never back down and admit it. I had made a statement and I was sticking to it no matter what! But, that wasn’t the end of it; the invitations kept coming.” I need a different strategy”, I thought, “This one isn’t working!”

One Saturday evening at a family potluck, much to the shock of everyone, I agreed to go to church with them on Sunday, but under my conditions. I would visit their church one time and one time only and they would agree to never ask me to go again. They looked at each other and nodded their heads in agreement, but the slight smiles that passed between them didn’t escape me. Again, I felt that they knew something that I didn’t and it made me uncomfortable and angry. I was desperate to get them “Off my back” though, and I figured after Sunday, it would be a done deal.

My mother-in-law and Joe’s aunt agreed to go with me to church. My heart certainly wasn’t into going and I went under strong protest, but I had agreed to attend, so with an angry rebellious attitude, I walked through the door of the church that morning and made my way down the aisle to find a seat. The back row was my choice, but we ended up two rows from the front. It was all I could do to control the impulse to jump up and run out of the church as fast as my legs would carry me, but I was held

captive in my seat; I couldn't move. Little did I know that my life would be radically changed that morning! I entered the church as one person, but I would leave a different person.

The service started. This type of worship was foreign to me. It was so different from my Mormon background. I was struggling to maintain a calm composure, as I tried to remember what the family had shared about the pastor. Brother Patterson was an old country preacher from Oklahoma who only had a sixth grade education, but when he preached, the heavens opened, the devil took flight and his flock dropped to their knees seeking this Jesus he brought to life in their hearts and spirits. I knew right away that this was a man who truly loved God and I could trust him (a big statement for me to admit; coming from my abusive childhood background. To gain my trust was almost an impossible feat!).

Brother Patterson began to preach. His message on the heart, brought conviction; it gripped my very soul. Suddenly, I did not like the lifestyle I was living and I didn't like the things that were being exposed in my heart nor the behavior it caused to erupt from past wounds and childhood bondages that were mean and caused others pain. My tongue was speaking death not life. I needed to change. I wanted to change. The words were as a sharp knife cutting deep into my heart; a cut here and a slice there and yet, The Holy Spirit was touching and wrapping His love around my heart too.

When Bro. Patterson shared where your sins will take you if not confessed and repented of, I was crying deep within. My heart felt like it was breaking into a thousand pieces. I whispered, "What do I do to stop this pain? How can I change?" Then he told about Jesus, the Son of God, and how out of His great love for me, Jesus chose to die on the cross for my sins. He provided a way to set me free that I might be assured of a place in heaven with Him. I wasn't lost! I wasn't stuck in a place of helplessness! Jesus loved me. I was worth saving. My life could change for the better. He said that He would always be with me. He was my hope.

Here I was, a person that hated changes, but my heart was crying out for His changes. I wanted this Jesus to come into my heart and live there forever. When the altar call was given, I found myself kneeling at the altar asking Jesus to come into my heart and be my Lord and Master. Oh Yes, I wanted the changes that Jesus could bring into my life. I wanted the hurt and pain to leave. I wanted to love and not hate. I wanted to trust people and believe the good in them. As the Holy Spirit exposed my heart with all the darkness within, I asked God's light to come in and cleanse me. He did! God performed open heart surgery and my life was radically changed that Sunday morning on March 27, 1960.

Do you remember the day you received heart surgery? May we never forget. It was the best day of my life for I too, found the secret of life behind the smiles; Jesus Christ! He is the same today, yesterday and forever. He is the great Physician and heart surgery is his specialty. So don't give up on your loved ones and the lost. Keep inviting and keep praying. God will answer!