

kept reading. We even read parts of the book of the Revelation. How exciting-and a bit scary-to read that apocalyptic book at night!

The part that spoke to me the most was in John, chapter 10. There, Jesus encountered some religious leaders in Jerusalem. He claimed to be the Messiah and equal with God. They picked up stones to stone him and he declared, "For which of my works do you stone me?" That was a stunning statement. I was sure this was a typo. I'd read philosophy and anticipated that Jesus the philosopher would say, "For which of my words do you stone me?" But this wasn't a typographical error. This was a religious man, standing in front of other religious leaders, saying something like, "If I've done anything wrong, go ahead and kill me." Wow! Imagine inviting religious people to scrutinize you. It's like asking your mother to tell you if you have any dirt on your trousers after playing outside in the mud. Of course, they'll find the sins.

Now I knew a little something about being inspected by religious leaders. When I was about 14, my mother had knitted a beautiful white tennis sweater with interwoven blue and red cable stitching. How proud I was to wear it to the synagogue one Shabbat. During the course of the service, the rabbi called me to the front and cupping my chin in his palm, he chided me for not dressing suitably (meaning I should have worn a jacket and not a sweater). For added emphasis, he knocked my jaw upward. Now this was probably not at all typical of most rabbis, but it was my experience and so this is how I thought of religious authorities.

How could Jesus have stood in front of such people to invite them to find fault. Even more amazing, these leaders could not find a thing wrong with Jesus!

Who is this guy?

The person of Jesus was very appealing. The New Testament was a defensible book; the gospel was a defensible story. As I found myself drawn to Jesus I began asking myself, how could I do this? How could I be Jewish and believe in Jesus? It seemed like such a paradox. My upbringing told me that the beliefs that were making so much sense to me were off-limits for a Jew. But what I was reading and what I was sensing from having asked God was this: If Jesus was the Messiah, then the most "right" thing I could do as a Jew, and as a person seeking truth, was to believe. I knew what the consequences would be and did not relish them. It would hurt my family. I would be an outcast. Believing and following Jesus would have a serious impact on my dating life and in fact, on my entire social situation. But, I concluded, if it's the Truth, then that's what I want more than anything. And I continued to read.

My father came into my room that following Sunday and saw me pouring over the Bible that Marva had lent me. (I'd hardly stopped reading since Friday night.) "Whose Bible is this?" he asked as he removed it from my hands. "God's," I whispered rather loudly but with a sense of awe. He stormed out of my room, Bible in hand, and tossed it in the kitchen trash. I later retrieved it.

The actual moment of saying 'yes'

On Monday night, I went to Marva's house. I had concluded from my reading that I did not need "meaning and relevance." I needed and longed for forgiveness.

It was May 17, 1971. I sat on the step of Marva's front porch and prayed with her. I asked God to forgive me, to consider Jesus' atoning death the covering for my sins, to give me a new life. And he did.

I felt an immediate change. I guess it was noticeable because Marva, who wouldn't let me hug her before (she knew my state!) now welcomed me as a brother in Messiah, a fellow disciple. She taught me the song "Amazing Grace" that night. I'd heard Judy Collins sing it before, but didn't understand a thing until that night. It was a joy to sing about grace after truly experiencing it.

That night, I went back to my parents' house in Prairie Village, Kansas and told them of my new faith. They thought I was crazy. How could a Jew be a Christian? I assured them that my decision was real, that it was based on Truth. My parents were good people and, in their way, they were very committed Jews; they wanted to do the right thing. My father felt that I should leave the house immediately. My mother convinced him to allow me to spend the night. I went to bed with a sense of real sadness, yet in some inexplicable way, I still had joy in my heart.

I awoke to the sound of yelling. My parents didn't know what to do with

me; I didn't know what to do with them. The best solution was for me to move out, which I did that morning. I got a new apartment on Charlotte Street in Kansas City, a new job at Winstead's (a local "burger joint"), and most important, I got a new life and a new perspective. All within 12 hours.

Then what?

I began to measure reality in terms of God rather than my own self-actualization. Jesus provided the atonement I needed to know God, to relate to him. God was still "other" but he had reached out to his creation to me--- through his Messiah, Jesus.

Before believing in Jesus, I was discouraged that I could never measure up. I felt condemned by each and every failure-not because someone was actively chastising me, but because I didn't see any biblical provision of forgiveness for breaking the many rules and regulations.

After Jesus, I was still very much aware of my imperfections, but even more aware of his perfections. He could do what I couldn't-make it through this life without mistakes. He knew the difference between pleasing God and pleasing people. And his ability to please God perfectly-and to die in place of those who deserved God's condemnation-provided atonement, covering for my sin and for anyone else who would claim it. Now that didn't mean I was free to live a life of immorality or hypocrisy, or that I didn't need to concern myself with pleasing God. It meant that I wanted, more than ever, to please this God

of forgiveness, this God of love. I could trust him to guide me and when I fell, I could trust him to pick me up.

I didn't run out to become a missionary. But I did begin to speak to people on the streets immediately, since I wanted others to have this life-saving experience. I went to bars to tell people about Jesus and to Bible studies and churches to learn more about him. I listened to Bible teaching tapes and went to conferences about Jesus. I played songs about Jesus on my 12-string guitar anywhere and everywhere I could. I truly felt compelled to proclaim God's good love in Jesus.

After about four months, I stuck out my thumb and went hitchhiking again-mostly around Texas, Missouri, Oklahoma and eventually Wichita and Lawrence, Kansas. There I met Steve Churchill, a believer in Jesus who became like a brother to me. We began to pray and ask God how we could serve him in Lawrence.

Church in Lawrence Kansas

Steve and I started a church called "The Mustard Seed," a meaningful name to me because Jesus said that is as much faith as we need-the size of a mustard seed. I had learned from experience what God can do with a tiny speck of faith. That's all I had when I realized that if Jesus was true, I wanted to believe. The Mustard Seed church began as a small group of people who wanted to study the Bible together . . . and eventually grew to a community of about 700 people. In fact, over the last 54

years thousands of people have joined in the community there; I've been privileged to be part of it for many decades. Our first meeting was in January 1972 in the First Presbyterian Church under the name "BASIC (Brothers and Sisters in Christ)" Then in April 1972, we moved into the house on Tennessee Street and renamed it the Mustard Seed.

I was teaching and pastoring (we didn't use that term . . . it sounded too institutional) when I met Patty, a university freshman who began attending The Mustard Seed. It was 1974. We married in 1977.

The church was growing by leaps and bounds when I stepped down from my position. I wanted to devote more of myself to finishing university, to my wife and also to my job.

I graduated from the University of Kansas with a Bachelor of Science degree in Education and became a high school mathematics teacher in Basehor, Kansas. I got along well with the students and truly enjoyed my job. I had hoped that this was to be my calling. But there was something else.

I just had to tell people about Jesus-from the very beginning. And so it was inevitable that I would eventually become associated with a group of people who just had to do the same.

Jews for Jesus?

I first encountered Jews for Jesus in May of 1973, when their Jewish music group, "The Liberated Wailing Wall", came through Lawrence, Kansas. After meeting them I went out immediately and got a T-shirt made that said, "Jews for Jesus." I liked the way they identified themselves up front. Eight months later, I traveled to California to visit several organizations, including Jews for Jesus.

Moishe Rosen, the founder of Jews for Jesus, was in the office when I came and he invited me to lunch. As we sat in a Chinese restaurant, he asked me something to the effect of, "What can you do to help Jews for Jesus?" I thought it was a pretty good organization and it hadn't occurred to me that I had anything to add. Yet that question riveted me. What can I do to help people find what Jesus offers? How can I use the talents God has given me to serve him today?

I felt a tug, but I had a plan for my life-which at that time did not include being a missionary. Over the next few years, different people from Jews for Jesus came through the Lawrence area. They generally encouraged me in my efforts to serve God, and usually invited me to join their efforts too.

Finally in 1978, when I was leading a rather predictable and respectable life as a math teacher, Sam Nadler, then a staff member from Jews for Jesus, passed through the area. We met and he urged me to consider investing my life as an evangelist. I knew how difficult it had been for me to consider Jesus. Here was an opportunity to spend my life speaking to

my own people about a matter of life and death. For the first time, I said I would talk to God about it.

A couple of months passed and I could not shake the idea. Moishe's question was still hanging in the air. I called San Francisco to talk to him. A few months later, in September 1979, Patty and I joined the staff of Jews for Jesus. We've lived in San Francisco, Chicago, Washington D.C., New York . . . and in 1998 we packed up and moved with our three children to Sydney, Australia. When you hand over the reins of your life to God you never know where you will end up-but it's always an adventure!

By way of a postscript, a few words about my Grandma Bessie. She never wanted to have anything to do with the person of Jesus for as long as I could remember. Whenever I would try to broach the subject, she would flick the back of her hand in the air to indicate her disinterest. She refused even to pronounce the name "Jesus." It was a painful memory to her and so many of our people who sustained hurt, humiliation, rejection and even death from those who named Jesus as their God and motivator.

When Grandma was put in a nursing care facility it had nothing to do with her wits, but rather the frailty of her aging body. One October morning in 1991, I went there for an early visit. Rarely would I bring my Bible to visit her because she had made it so clear, so often, that she was not interested in hearing anything from the Bible. Nevertheless, I

brought it in that day.

I began speaking to the charge nurse assigned to Grandma Bessie's floor. She wanted to know what I did for a living and I told her I worked with Jews for Jesus. She was thrilled, since she, too, was a believer in Jesus. We spoke about eternal things as I approached Grandma's room.

As soon as I walked in the door, Grandma greeted me with, "What was it you were talking about just now?"

Matter-of-factly I answered, "We were talking about the forgiveness of sins that Jesus offers and the eternal life that he brings."

"I would like to hear more about that," she announced. My jaw nearly hit the ground! With surprise and delight, I opened the Bible and began reading to her. I could almost see something going on in her heart and mind as she listened. After 30 minutes of conversation, I asked Grandma, "Would you like to accept God's forgiveness through Jesus now?" And at the age of 96, she did!

The peace and joy that flooded her soul were evident. Her eyes lit up and her face shone. She continued to shine for five more years, until at the age of 101, she left this earth and went to meet her Messiah face to face.

If you want to know the truth about Jesus, it doesn't matter if you are young, old or in-between. Please ask God to tell you what is real.



My Bar Mitzvah 1964 "Today I am a man"



My hippie look with aviator glasses, long sideburns, and the requisite guitar



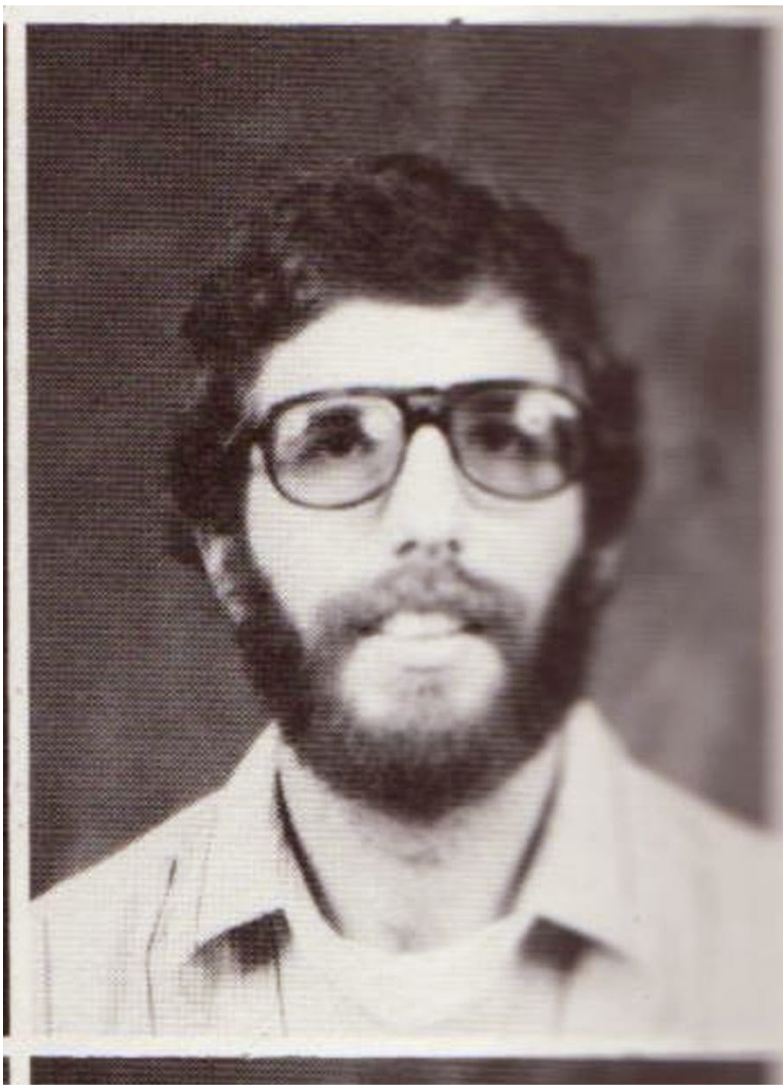
Hebrew school graduation with Mom and Dad by my side. 1966



Wandering Jew and his sister at her place in Miami. 1971 February.



Patty as a university freshman Spring 1975



Basehor High School teacher photo. Taught mathematics. Photo from 1978.