

**“No longer among the
tares, chaff and
stubble.”**

**Personal Testimony
Of Michelle Bledsoe Allen**

Saved July 7, 2023

When I was 15 years old my father died of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. In the hospital at St. Francis, a priest came in randomly to visit him. My father told Father John that he would have liked to have been Catholic. My father had grown up Baptist, but he didn't believe in original sin or hellfire and damnation, so he had never gone to church. By the world's standards, he wasn't a bad man, but he wasn't a good man either. I have a lot of the same sins as my father. However, he was the glue that held my family together which included my two stepsisters who are 17 and 16 years older than me. My mother and oldest sister decided to fulfill his wish and we became Catholic. The years after my father died were painfully lonely. I remember sitting in midnight mass on Christmas eve, feeling hollow and mourning deeply for the loss of my father, the Catholic church gave me no comfort. I was always shy, quiet, depressed, and full of anxiety and fear.

In 1993, I went away to college at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas. It was an extremely liberal school and I loved alternative thinking. I went for psychology, but after a semester of being introduced to philosophy in my "Western Intellectual Traditions" class, I changed my major to Religion and Philosophy. I studied all religions except for Christianity which I rejected. I was particularly fascinated by Indian culture and the Hindu religion and its many gods, mainly because they seemed so unique. I considered myself agnostic, as I felt I didn't know if God existed or not. I did feel great satisfaction when philosophers would argue what the First Cause was and some of the greatest minds to ever exist could not disprove God. I enjoyed St. Thomas Aquinas because his

arguments started with God as the first cause and went from there to explain the universe. I was always seeking answers and had the desire to KNOW without a shadow of a doubt what the reason for man's existence was.

When I was 27, I met the child my mother and father had put up for adoption before they got married. Tisha was Baptist and she worked on me awhile with the "salvation prayer" and gave me the bible I still use today. One day in July of 2007, in my car trying to get to work, I was crying, missing my father and just down on the world; I decided to pray the prayer. When I opened my eyes, I saw God everywhere. I thought I was saved and asked my sister to recommend a church. I started going to Bethel Baptist in Walls, MS and got baptized for the second time in my life (first time was in Catholic church). The pastor never questioned my salvation. I would envy the church community and the married couples. I prayed at a chili supper to meet someone to marry so I could be like the other female members of the church.

I met Drew online. The website matched us on the search term "Baptist" as both of our religion. These were the first instances I saw of God working in my life, "raining on the just and the unjust." I would have feelings about sins I had, but I didn't obey.

Drew and I married, bought a house, got a dog, then we got pregnant. Having a baby made the drive from Cordova to church in Walls, MS harder and we stopped going. We didn't think of the school district we were in when we bought our first house, so I had the "bright idea" of sending her to Catholic school. In order to get the tuition cheaper, we

had to join the church. Drew tried, but he never liked it. It was very hard to be married and be divided on an issue like religion. I am so grateful to God that it did not drive us apart, though there were a few times I thought it might.

In 2018, my mom who had lived in Marion, Arkansas had a mini stroke, fell and hurt herself badly. This started us on the process of selling both her house and our house. That way we could move to a better school system for my daughter and be able to have my mom live with us. We were looking at all municipalities, but I just felt drawn to Arlington. We moved into the house we are in now the week of spring break right as lockdown for Covid-19 came. For three years we were in Arlington without a church. I had searched for independent Baptist churches and saw Lighthouse in the list but had not yet been moved to come back to church.

The summer of 2022, I had taken out the bible again trying to “study” on my own and trying to pray more. In the fall, I applied for a job that was outside the education field and one that if I had taken, I know now in hindsight, would have not be conducive to church and camp in the summer in the same way as being a teacher-librarian does. I prayed to God that I would get that job and he told me “You are asking something of me when you do not do as I command. “You need to go to church” and I said “yes Sir”. Around that same time one day I had driven out of the parking lot of my allergy clinic that is located right by Lighthouse and I looked over to my left to check traffic and turn toward home and I saw the light on in the lighthouse and God said “there”. I went home and braced myself to tell my husband “We are going to church on Sunday.” Drew was

agreeable, but even on the drive to Lighthouse he said, “we could try this one and then if we don’t like it we could try Harvest church....” We went to Lighthouse that day and we never left.

I still thought I was saved for several months at Lighthouse. I even thought I was saved the first time I went down to the alter and cried so badly asking God for forgiveness for turning away from Him. As I cried, I thought how could I go away from God when he showed me He existed! I also had broken some very big commandments and I knew even then without godly sorrow that that was not right. I pressed my forehead so hard into that carpet that day I thought when I stood up, I would surely have carpet burn on my forehead!

Through talking to Ms. Janet, I knew there was something wrong about my false testimony. When I told her I had not heard preaching when I was “saved” I saw her face fall and I knew. Then I went to Johnathan and Hannah Purdy’s house holding on to a thin thread that I was saved. I read Hannah’s parents testimony, I flopped between yes and no. Drew and I had figure this out, so we Drew invited Bro. Greg and Ms. Janet to our house for dinner. Hearing Bro. Greg list off the elements of salvation, well that might as well been Greek to me at that time. I was thinking “oh no, I’m Lost- let me own it and start from here”. It really did feel like being lost on a journey. I wanted a road map for the journey and learned that Bro. Greg suggested to other members to read “Pilgrim’s Progress” so I started there. I thought when I had my previous “religious

experience” God revealed Himself to me, but I had never known Christ and He was who I needed to get to know.

Bro. Mike came to Lighthouse and preached on Christ being Prophet, Priest and King.

There was something he said that hit hard, it was that when Jesus comes back, he comes back as The Judge. I never knew it was Jesus who was the judge. I still held the Hollywood image of Jesus who was loving and kind. Wasn't it supposed to be God that was the angry, wrathful one? Around this same time, I read a passage in Pilgrim's Progress where Pilgrim has a dream in which Jesus says to “gather together the tares, the chaff and the stubble, and cast them into the burning lake.” Which comes from Matthew 13:30. Through reading that and learning what it meant, it became the most frightening imagery I have ever read. In my own study, I read 2 Corinthians 5:10 “We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ.” I was beside myself with fear and that stayed with me for some weeks. This began my time of conviction. God was very kind to me working on each sin in turn and giving me time to rest in between. There were times when I wept, it was so intense, and I cried so hard I thought I would throw up. Many times, I went to work and thought I could honestly call in sick because I was soul sick. I cried on the way to work and at work, wiping tears away quickly as children or adults came into my classroom so they wouldn't ask what was wrong.

I began to look around my house at items that no longer felt right to have in my sight and got rid them and replaced them with scripture because I had read Deuteronomy 6 in which the words of God should be written on the posts of thy house. I got rid of all

social media because the images it brought to my mind did not match with where I was on my journey. I had some statues of Hindu gods, that I used for decoration in my office, and when praying one day God told me to get rid of them. I got rid of all but three, so I *still* was not obedient. Bro. Greg preached out of Hosea 5:13-15 in which “Ephraim saw his sickness” and in addition to that, this sermon had so many more arrows that pierced my heart. Bro. Greg said from Hosea 4:3 that Israel’s sin affected the land itself as well as all the animals “everyone that dwelleth there in shall languish.” I have always sought the dark. Ghost shows, horror movies, vampires, demons, and skulls. Like Ephraim, I was sick in the head. The darkness in me had spread so much in my heart that it was now spilling out of me and manifesting itself in my environment, on the walls of my literal house. And my sins were taking root in Arianna too. I cried while Bro. Greg preached, it was so intense, stomach sick again and I had a hard time keeping silent as I wept. After the service I told Bro. Greg what I was feeling, and he told me to smash with a hammer the remaining idols I had. There was one item I cried over before I smashed it. I realized how much hold material possessions had over me.

In May, Bro. Mike came back to Lighthouse to preach. There was something he said that gave me a big “ah ha!” moment- that we are covered like a veil with Jesus’ righteousness. When he said that I moved my hand over my face and said “veil” there was some seed of understanding there. The next morning, I tried to hold on to that seed of understanding and I felt a strong pull, a draw, for the first time. Something had shifted. But I pushed it away. I didn’t mean to. Why had I done that? It was at that time God first started helping me to identify my unbelief.

As a sin, unbelief was much harder for me to overcome, and I didn't have the first clue how I could do it. Getting rid of Hindu idols was easy compared to this. Bro. Greg preached from Mark 9:24 "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" and he said that unbelief and belief could exist side by side. And I started to notice that in my thoughts, there would be a tiny nagging, like that of a flittering moth, that would dart in my thoughts. It was not my desire to think or feel at all, but it was there. I began to understand that God was the only one to help me with my unbelief, it was impossible for ME to do. Bro. Greg said that "faith drives out fear" and that we needed to have greater faith. And I began to pray for God to heal my unbelief and help grow my faith. I thought about this almost every minute.

Bro. Greg was preaching from Hebrews 11:5-6 "without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is." During that sermon I felt Christ draw me again, this time as if He was reaching out His hand to me. But I sat frozen in fear, it was only after He left that I overrode my pride and went to the altar, knowing I had missed my opportunity, but trying to obey even after the fact.

My first time at Camp Liberty arrived and I felt God drawing me the entire time. I felt so full of His love. One night in the hotel, as I was praying in bed, I felt God move with so much love towards me. But then had a non-focused thought, it wasn't even fully formed thought, just that nagging unbelief had dropped my focus and God retreated. I told Ms. Janet at Camp, and I likened it to one of the camp sermons in which one of the

preachers said God is not going to force you into loving Him. He had backed away knowing that I did not consent.

On July 2nd, Bro. Greg preached on the penitent woman with the alabaster box and that she took “advantage of her advantage” of being near Him. I knew I could never reject Christ again. At home I knelt down at my bedside in prayer and contrition weeping so much my bed became wet with my tears and I thought of the verse in Psalm 6:6 “I water my couch with my tears.” The following sermon he preached from the Pharisee’s point of view. When he was saying his closing prayer, Bro. Greg told God he was ashamed for us not taking advantage of our advantage. That hurt so bad. I wept out loud uncontrollably during church which I usually don’t do in public due to my pride. I told God I was ashamed of myself and agreed with Him on my unbelief.

The next night just before midnight on July 7th, as I was trying to fall asleep, I was praying to God and thinking of unbelief. It had been feeling like God was taking a highlighter to it. Big yellow marks all over my thoughts. I got so fearful that the unbelief would grab onto me too tightly I decided as soon as I could I was going to talk to Bro. Greg because I felt I was slipping. However, as I prayed, I started clinging to the faith I have had since the day I heard from God to go to Lighthouse. I thought of the promises God had already fulfilled since that day. I recalled in my mind Christ drawing me during the sermons, and regretting the times I was frozen in fear and didn’t go to Him. This time I envisioned standing up and walking toward Him. As I thought of Christ drawing me in the memory of that day, Christ was suddenly there in the present. My heart

swelled and I knew it was Him. The next part happened so quickly, it's hard to explain. I wasn't really thinking at all, I just wanted Jesus with all that I am. I drew nigh to Him. It was a split second when I was there in what you may call an embrace, "Thank you Jesus" poured out of my lips over and over and over. I said "You are beautiful" and "My lord Jesus; I love you." I started to laugh/cry and had the thought "that is this happening!" My heart felt so full. As if my soul was expanding towards Him. Connected; drawing each other, Him to me and me to Him. He seemed to withdraw slowly as if the task was complete. I asked Him not to go, He came back, and my heart filled again. Then I knew He would come again to me in the same way each time, draw nigh to Him and He'd be there. "Just the beginning of the journey; don't worry. " I thought how kind He had been throughout my time of conviction and how I deserved much more pain and suffering. He showed me He had already paid it. I had just felt a little of the crushing weight of sin that He traded. I rested in the fact that there is no more fear, God's got this and that never changes. I tested thoughts of Pilgrims Progress, the tares and the chaff. I wasn't that. I felt aside it, not of it. That's not me anymore. I understood the allegory of the gate in Pilgrim's Progress. Now I was the pilgrim and the journey to the Celestial City had begun. I am so filled with joy and thankfulness that God is always drawing us and loving us and that it never changes.