

On the way to church, I'd have a family meeting and tell them: "Five minutes after church is over, I want you all out here in the car." We'd go to church and put on nice smiles.

I was careful not to get there early. It is funny to think about it now because I know God was involved. The ushers would save the closest parking spot to the front door, so I could be the last one in and the first one out. They also saved me a chair in the last row in the back of the church. In this last row of chairs, I was assured of being the last one in and the first one out.

Now I was in church with nothing to do. I would sit flipping through the Bible pages, looking at the maps, and trying not to fall asleep. They'd only have one service, I hoped. I wanted to get out early because the football game was on.

It seemed like the pastor and everybody in the church was perfect. Perfect hair, perfect suit—everything perfect! Then I'd go to my oil field work and everything was not perfect. But as long as I attended church, Mama was happy.

As a child, I had very little exposure to the church. My parents were divorced. When we were little we were Catholic, but not really raised Catholic. We simply attended the Catholic Church. My siblings and I made the march to church every Sunday.

My mom worked two jobs, so she primarily went to church on Easter and Christmas. One time we all went on Easter Sunday morning, but when we walked in, the priest would not allow my mom to enter--because she was divorced.

It hurt my mom and it hurt me. I thought: That's not God, anyway. We wanted to cry out to God when we needed Him, but we didn't understand how we could.

After that incident, we quit going to church and I didn't want anything to do with church.

I wanted to marry someone who loved God. I wanted someone who could teach me about God. I've never had an interest in reading the Bible for myself. I thought it was only words. I am certainly not a Bible scholar. And I still don't know the Bible as well as I'd like.

I wanted my children to know God because I knew He could come through for them in difficult times. I only wanted God at certain times.

But as I went through life, I could see God's hand move here and there. I thought I had to provide for my family, but I didn't have to trust God. I knew He was there, but I couldn't trust Him.

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I knew I couldn't trust myself to keep all the commandments and not do wrong. I heard the sermons and believed God had a big measuring stick. I knew I would make a mistake. I would blow it. I couldn't live the "good lifestyle."

I thought a lot of sermons did not apply to me. I believed I had the "fire insurance." I loved God and believed I would go to heaven. I felt that was good enough.

I met an old school friend, but I knew I was not good enough for Natalie. She knew God. Every time she talked, it seemed like she wasn't talking like an ordinary person. At times she would slip up, but most of the time she was only speaking well. I married my friend.

I would see "spiritual" things happening but tell her, "Honey, this is not real, wake up." She would say "try this" and that was why I went to church. She was full of joy and I didn't want to rob her of that joy. I also didn't want our kids to miss out.

I tried to do a few of the things she said I should try. I tried to pray in the car, but then I would get slammed with a problem or be offended. It wasn't the same in the oil fields as in the church.

Natalie was an inspiration to me. I would call her from work when I got hurt and ask her to pray for me. As a welder, I often got burned. I would say "let's pray together" because I knew God would hear her prayer. She became my source of connection to God. I didn't think God was listening to me.

She has always been a rock for me. I was trying to understand God's love. I could see it in her but I couldn't see God move enough to trust him.

A turning point for me was when I lost my job and had a period of unemployment in 1994. We had a little bit of money in the bank. I could see in her eyes we needed to trust God. So finally I told the Lord, "I will give you a shot."

All of our efforts were focused on getting me a job. After the first month, there was no job. I have never been on unemployment compensation and praise God, I never have to this day. I was too proud to apply for unemployment compensation.

Then came month two—nothing! At the end of month three, I was ready to give up on trusting God with Natalie. We were keeping the situation away from the children so they would not be worried. I went into the garage, started pacing, and said, "God, I trusted you. This is not working. I trusted you and I still don't have a job."

But I was in conflict. I knew God was real. I knew He kept His promises. But it just wasn't happening. The next day I received a call from our competition offering me a job. I took it, even though it meant a weekly commute from Austin to Houston.

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