

## Certain We Were Christians

Up until almost exactly one year ago, our family lived what we believed to be a Christian life. As members of a local Methodist Church, we went to church on Sunday morning and we went home. Sunday morning was practically the only time in our lives that we even thought of Christ. That is not to say that we were not active in our church. We participated in all of the church activities. Our children were members of the youth group. We assisted and took part in mother/daughter banquets, father/son banquets, church fundraising activities, church gardening, and even served on the board of trustees.

We were just certain that we were Christians. As we sat in church every Sunday, we listened to what the pastor said, but we were not really hearing the Word. Life, as we thought it should be, was good. But in fact, we were clueless. As is true in so many people's lives, it was not until we experienced tragedy in our lives that we began looking for more.

We have two children. Our daughter was born first, and then three years later we had a son. While both are very kindhearted, family-oriented, athletic, and loved by most everyone who meets them, they are as opposite as day and night. Nichole has always been very conservative, slow to make friends, afraid of breaking rules or getting into trouble. Matthew, on the other hand, was always looking to spice things up. He wanted to be friends with everyone—every student, every teacher, everyone in his life. He loved to make people laugh, entertain and be the center of attention wherever he was. Matthew was not afraid to try anything once.

Unfortunately, this fearless nature may have been what led to his experimentation with drugs. He started in high school and continued as he entered college. His drug use eventually led to his arrest and current incarceration. It was the heartbreak and helplessness we felt, as we watched our son go through this chapter of his life, that opened our eyes and our hearts to Christ. We found ourselves praying more than ever. Probably like many people, it becomes easier to remember to pray when you are in need.

Before Matt went to prison, he had moved out of the house and was going to school and working for a local carpet retailer as a professional tile and carpet installer. He had been looking for a church to attend closer to where he was living. He had visited only a few churches in town when he was called to lay carpet and tile in a brand new church building. While working at the church, he met the pastor and they immediately became friends. Matthew couldn't wait to tell us about this pastor and this church. He knew that we were also looking for more in Christ. As he described the church, he told us, "You'll know this is the right church as soon as you go there." You'll feel the difference. And he was right—we did.

Unfortunately, Matthew was arrested just a couple of weeks before we started attending New Life Church. However, the Christians that attend New Life have continued to support Matthew and our entire family spiritually and emotionally. We have often considered the fact that if not for our son and the trouble in his life, we may not have opened our hearts to Christ. Matthew believes that he was arrested because the Lord was saving him from himself. After being drug-free for five months, his arrest was Christ's way of keeping him safe from his addiction.

We too believe that everything happens for a reason. If our son had not been subjected to all this turbulence in his life, we may not have had the desperate desire that enabled us to open our minds and our hearts to Jesus. We came to realize that we are not in control of what happens in Matthew's life. As parents, this was a very difficult realization. We had to learn how to turn our lives over to the Lord and accept whatever it is that he has in store for us. Once we were able to understand that simple concept, we experienced a sense of peace in our hearts. We have come to know that sense of peace as rebirth.

Since we have come to know Jesus Christ, we continue to notice things in our day-to-day lives that were probably there all along, but went unnoticed. We sing a Christmas carol that we have been singing all our lives and suddenly we actually feel the meaning of the words as we sing. The words were always just words in a song. But now those same words put tears in our eyes and a lump in our throats as we are humbled by the glory of God. We meet people for the first time and out of the blue they tell us that they are Christians and have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It makes us think about how Christianity has changed us, and what is it about us now that people see differently. There was a time in our lives that we rarely thought of Christ outside the church building that we attended on Sundays. Now we recognize that without Jesus Christ we have no life.

We hope and pray that we are reflecting what we have learned from others in the church. Every conversation can be a learning experience. As we meet and interact with the brothers and sisters of this church, we learn from the example that they set of what being a Christian is all about. They are supportive of each other and reach out to each other with love and fellowship. We have learned that fellowship is an important part of Christianity as it continually reaffirms and strengthens your beliefs. As we continue to mature as Christians, we pray that we will acquire the knowledge and the confidence to share our experience in Jesus Christ.