

The Prodigal Child Who Experienced God's Extravagant Grace

**(From murder of my unborn child, fornication, adultery,
drunkenness and more to the Lord Jesus)**

Sister Virginia

As a youngster I was taken to various Christian churches by my parents... Methodist, Congregational, Church of Christ. I learned about Jesus on Sunday, but through the week I did not see or hear much about Jesus at home, except for an occasional family devotions or Bible story. There was a lot of name-calling, put-downs, invalidation, lack of support, favoritism, neglect, abandonment, etc. I also felt like "the black sheep". For whatever reason, my sisters felt I was "different" and would joke that I was the "milkman's kid". Of course, it wasn't funny to me. I felt isolated, unaccepted, depressed, unloved and very alone, like I wasn't really part of the family. I hung out with the dog a lot.

My parents didn't realize the danger of occultic toys and games so us kids played with toys like the ouija board, 8 ball, troll dolls, etc. My older sisters started to conduct seances when I was 4 or 5. We did that at least a couple of times. This was all innocent, good, clean fun, right? [It was not]... As a family we celebrated the pagan holidays, Christmas, Easter and Halloween, etc. Why not? Everybody did. We even got to see Santa and received Christmas candy at one of the churches. As a pre-teen I gravitated towards the ungodly influences of magazines, books, etc.

At around age 7 or 8, at an emotional Summer Christian Camp meeting, I said a prayer to ask the Lord into my heart, and I felt like I was forgiven, and that I now had a home in heaven. When I got back home, I started to read my Bible, but it didn't last long. After a while, I would only read it when I was in the mood, which wasn't often. I was being pulled in different directions from family and school life, and had suffered some painful emotionally, sexually, and/or spiritually abusive experiences from church leaders and extended family.

I didn't read my Bible much at all by the time I was a teenager, and wasn't interested in going to church any longer, but still went when my parents insisted. I was tired of trying to "be good" and wanted to experience all the fun things in life - dating, parties, going to the beach. At age 16, I had allowed myself to be sucked into the ungodly culture and became intimate with my "boyfriend", and had started drinking beer.

It seems that I was a very angry young lady. I was angry that my parents held me back a year from taking driver's ed. Then I was angry that I wasn't allowed to attend the vocational school to become a hairdresser. By 18, I was skipping classes to smoke weed with a classmate. My rebellious nature was becoming more apparent. I even broke into the high school, after hours, with some friends, for a high school prank (my idea). I was

so proud of myself that we "got away with it". Since there "wasn't anything fun to do" in rural Ohio, we partied often. Getting drunk seemed to help me escape from my worsening feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and depression...at least for a little while until my hangover the next morning. I was mad that my parents couldn't afford to send me to go me to a college for Fashion Design, and wanted me to choose a "more practical" career at the local college. The career choices didn't interest me much, so I spent much of my college days at the bars or looking for a new boyfriend.

By age 21, I became even more of a juvenile delinquent, stealing clothes at the mall. The risk of being caught was exciting to me (and getting new free clothes too). Well, I eventually did get caught, but got off easy and never experienced any great repercussions from it (except the guilt and feeling bad for disappointing my mom, who was appalled that I would do anything like that). I was drinking regularly by then, and I had already gotten into a couple of car accidents when driving drunk. One accident smashed my nose on the front windshield which required surgery. You would think that would sober me up. No, it didn't.

I had also met my first "real boyfriend", but when that relationship become emotionally and physically abusive, I quit college, hopped on a bus, left the abusive boyfriend and the "mean" family behind, and went out to California to work at a Summer job to seek "the good life". The California life seemed like a lot more fun (Hollywood, beaches, fun outdoor sports). And, there I would not be under Dad's oppressive, "unfair" rules. What could go wrong?

So off I went, and I did have a great time in California, met lots of cool people and could party as much as I wanted - which was often! I was soon addicted to coffee to help me deal with the horrible hangovers. From there went to Sequoia (where I had a binge-purge episode after eating an entire box of chocolate mint cookies to help me deal with my worsening emotions), then a ski resort job (where I partied several times a week). Then it was off to Yosemite the following Summer. By then I had been disappointed by several boyfriends who didn't treat me how I felt I deserved. I was developing a lot of anger and bitterness toward men. (Of course I was the one who was actually the problem). After that Summer, I decided to go back home to finish college.

Once back at home I couldn't handle living under my parent's roof, but couldn't afford my own place, so I spend most of my time mountain biking (that seemed to satisfy my thrill-seeking addiction for a little while) or at the gym, just to get away from my "really uncool" parents. And, it was a great way to meet guys! Somehow I found more trouble and was introduced to cocaine. But I didn't have access to it, so it didn't become a problem...yet.

After I finished college, I again hopped on a bus with \$800 in my pocket and went back to CA, this time to Lake Tahoe. While there, I worked some office jobs in the casinos. I unwisely got involved with a married man who I met at a bar, who was separated from his wife. Dating him for the Summer, he became "the love of my life". But, when I saw

that relationship was going no where, I broke it off, in tears. I was in so much emotional pain that I sought anti-depressants from a psychologist. But she told me, "You don't need them. You already broke off the relationship. Focus on doing something good for someone else." So, I did, and that helped a little, but I didn't find out until much later that the heartache from that relationship would last for decades.

I started working as a cocktail waitress, so I had access to as much "free" alcohol as I wanted. I even got into bartending. One night on a date, I snorted cocaine again for the 2nd time. I liked it so much I was soon buying it for myself. Within a few months I was addicted, doing more and more, and spending all of my money just for the "high". I even got stopped by a cop when driving to work when I was high on it, but for some reason I did not get arrested. When I lost my job, I couldn't get it any longer and so I was forced to get "clean". Still being on the rebound from breaking it off with "the love of my life", I quickly found a new boyfriend to fill the void. Soon we were in bed together. I ended up pregnant. The boyfriend did not want anything to do with a baby, and even threatened to come and take the child away when it was a few years old, telling me that his mom was in the legal field. I sought advice from friends. I made the unwise, selfish "convenient" choice and decided to have an abortion. It was just a few cells, as my friend had stated, right? So I wouldn't change my mind, I went out and got drunk...now I could never have the baby because it would be born brain damaged after drinking so much. That's how I thought, sadly. I "took care of it" within a few weeks. Done. Over. Finished. Right? No. Not at all. The guilt and shame I had afterwards was excruciating. I knew in my heart it was wrong. I hated myself and my life. I also knew I was in trouble with alcohol, even drinking alone at home sometimes, so when a friend was moving to Sacramento, I tagged along. That would solve the drinking problem, right?

I got a "real" job as a medical transcriber. I continued going to bars and partying on weekends. Of course I got involved with all the "wrong men" there too. They were players and didn't want to settle down. Of course, I was commitment-phobic and not ready for anything serious either, since I was angry and bitter at men, so that suited me just fine...for a while... But I was getting tired of it. My heart still yearned for real love and happiness and excitement. Where was the good life I had been seeking?

One day while reading the newspaper I saw an article about a designer who seemed so happy and fulfilled. Something clicked. I would become a Fashion designer. I wanted to "be somebody". That would make me happy. Boyfriends did not made me happy. Drinking and drugs did not made happy. Skiing and mountain biking did not make me happy. Surely having the fun, creative career - that I had dreamed of since childhood, that would make me happy, right? So, I took some classes at a local college, and enjoyed it. But I would have to move to L.A. If I really wanted to pursue a career in that. So off I went to L.A. I worked part-time and took design classes on the side. Since I was so ambitious, I could handle the 3 hrs/day of driving between work, school and home. It was the 90's, the time of Yuppies and Type A personalities, and I was caught up in my dream career and being "successful". I was still bar-hopping on weekends sometimes, but I managed to win some awards, and seemed to be on my way to a promising career.

So, I should be happy, right? No. Something was not right.

I was not a nice person. I had a competitive spirit and was very unhappy with myself. I still had a lot of guilt, shame, and sadness. I remember getting very angry and verbally abusive at a young lady in an L.A. Traffic jam, only later to realize she was someone in my classes! Boy did I hate myself for behaving so badly! I couldn't seem to control my anger or frustration, but I did finish my degree with flying colors!

After graduation, I landed some fashion design jobs in L.A. We had been warned of the cut-throat industry from our instructors, yet I pressed on because of the dream still alive inside of me. I started freelancing while living in Hermosa Beach, and that was quite fun, yet I still dealing with a lot guilt, shame and emotional baggage. I had stopped dating completely for a couple of years to take a break. I was tired of feeling used and disrespected in relationships. But I was mostly tired of myself - tired of all the anger, moodiness and feeling helpless. And I wanted to be the kind of person who would date someone for a really long time before jumping into bed with them. (At the time, I thought I could have self-respect if I could do that, yet I knew I didn't have the self-control that it would take). I hated the way I felt inside - empty, angry, bitter, hopeless, depressed. The design jobs in the fashion industry were fun, and it was exciting to see all the new trends and design new styles. Yet I had this big empty spot inside that this great new career was not filling it up. I was doing my dream job, and that was great, but I was the problem. I didn't like myself. I wanted so bad to change, but I didn't know how. It was at that low point that I finally slowed down enough to hear what I now know to be the gentle urging of the Holy Spirit, nudging me back to God. So I went to a local church the next week. I felt a little strange, yet during the sermon, I had this overwhelming sense that this was exactly the place I was supposed to be. I could barely keep the tears from starting. I grabbed a few salvation tracts on the way out and escaped before anyone could talk to me.

I spent the next few days reading the tracts. I got out the little New Testament that I had kept with me all those years and began reading, until finally I could not resist the Holy Spirit any longer. I don't remember everything I prayed, but I told the Lord how sorry I was for everything wrong I had done, and pleaded for forgiveness. I now wanted to follow him and live by his rules, and wanted him to be my God. I asked him to make me into the person he wanted me to be. I instantly felt a flood of relief, and his love filled up the emptiness inside. I knew I was forgiven, and he was giving me another chance. I was now his child for real, still loved and adored, even after all the wrong things I had done - which was immense! (Murder of my unborn child, fornication, adultery, drunkenness, stealing, foul mouth, lewd behavior, unforgiveness, bitterness, ungodly anger and attitudes, gluttony, pride, idolatry, addictions...the list went on and on and on...). I was continually in tears for about two weeks, either from being sorry for all my my sin, as each area was brought to mind; or from joy that the Lord was filling me with. I was so thankful that the Lord "took me back".

I wholeheartedly agree with Paul:

This is a trustworthy saying, worthy of full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. But for this very reason I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His perfect patience as an example to those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, and invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. - 1 Timothy 1:15-17

Back at work, my co-workers asked me, "What ...happened to you?" And I told them. They just looked at me strangely. I was rejected and called a "Bible Thumper" by other friends who I told of my experience. Other friends faded away when they found out. Yes, it hurt, but since the Lord accepted me, what did it matter if those people didn't? I'm with my Lord and Savior, and that's what matters! The one true Love of my Life..., the one who made me and never gave up on me all through my sin and rebellion! The one who so patiently continues to make me more like him.

He convicted me of my immodest way of dressing and took away my desire to get drunk or "check out" on drugs. The Lord has kept me from fornication and adultery. I've been celibate since I became a Christ-follower (25 years). (Note: I did get another fun job as a clothing designer in L.A., as a Christian, but the job did not last more than a year, as I refused to go along with their dishonest practices). The Lord also gave me a great desire to read and study the scriptures. I wanted to "make up for lost time". Through much prayer, worship and Bible study the Lord showed me how to forgive, let go of past hurts, and he healed me emotionally. He showed me how to say "no" to the demonic influences that affect our emotions, thoughts and actions. He showed me the power of loving our enemies....he is teaching me all the time, making me more like him.

He has showed me how to discern false teaching and unbiblical practices in the "Christian" churches such as pagan holidays, witchcraft, Calvinist doctrines, etc. (by listening to his Spirit and comparing everything to scripture). He gave me love for others and concern for their spiritual state, especially. He's helping me use my gifts of teaching, counseling and sharing my faith.

No matter what we have to go through in these last days before Jesus returns, there is nothing more important than to stay in close relationship with my awesome God! I'm forgiven and his child because of the Lord's extravagant grace and Jesus' great sacrifice - dying on the cross for my sins! I know God raised Jesus from the grave, and that he will also raise his his true children on the Last Day. Even if I have to be a martyr, that will be a small price to pay for the immense grace he has shown me! And it will seem like nothing compared to what he has in store for his children in heaven for all of eternity! That's what I will focus on, no matter how much rejection, hatred, temptation or hard times I must go through. I know through it all, the Lord is shaping me, growing me,

advocating for me, and encouraging me to run the race, not give up, and finish the work he gave me to do.

Even if I have to go alone, I will continue on in this unpopular, "old-fashioned" faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing one day none of the persecution will matter when we will be forever blissful in the presence of the Almighty God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit! He is all I want.

None of that other stuff satisfies us. I know -- I experienced the "good life" first-hand (an exciting creative career, fun extreme sports, the "fun" party lifestyle, freedom to date whoever I wanted. (I somehow knew that gobs of money would never satisfy me.) I found out that its not good at all without Jesus. Knowing the one true God...He is the one my soul longs for. He is true life, joy and peace. Being in a close relationship with him, understanding his truths; being free from the constant anger, demonic oppression, addictions, despair, worthlessness, depression, anxiety... that is true life! And being free from the weight of guilt and shame of my past sin. The Lord's promises are true:

"You seek me and find me when you shall search for me with all of your heart" Jer. 29:13.

"Seek the Lord while he can still be found..." Is. 55:6.