

## An Exchanged Life Testimony

Personally, I lived over 20 years of my life in a spiritual wilderness before appropriating my identity in Christ. The scriptural concept of “abiding in the vine” had always escaped my grasp. I longed in my heart to experience it, yet no matter how much I “did,” the abiding life and its associated abundant living remained elusive. I did what I knew best and threw myself into my studies. I devoured Richard Foster’s, *Celebration of Discipline*, and the associated theological teachings of Dallas Willard. I read every one of their books. I studied the inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting and Bible study; the outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission and service, and the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance and celebration. I assiduously researched and then painstakingly emulated the ways of the early church Christian mystics and Desert Fathers. I studied the writings of John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, Brother Lawrence, Madame Guyon, and William Law, to name a few. I saturated myself in the writings of Henri Nouwen. I longed for the abundant life that I read so much about. I set out to be the best Christian I could by attempting to implement all of the spiritual disciplines that I learned from those great authors. Yet, ultimately, it was to no avail.

Then, through a seemingly inconsequential connection with Luther Rice, I ended up being introduced to the teachings of the Exchanged Life, first through the reading of Dr. Charles Solomon’s *Handbook to Happiness* and *The Ins and Out of Rejection*. My initial exposure was meant to be a simple academic exercise, yet I struggled with the principles that were taught. In particular, I couldn’t come to grips with the notion of *appropriation*. I later realized that my struggle was not with terminology, rather it was with the fundamental concept of faith. Interestingly, it took a simple paragraph out of Bill Gillham’s book, *Lifetime Guarantee*, to help me realize what faith truly is. Gillham said that, as a believer, I was united with Christ. I was crucified with Him, buried with Him, raised with Him, and ascended with Him in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:4-7). He said that Jesus is the Vine and I am a branch of that Vine (John 15:1-8). He said that just as I was born in

Adam and likewise condemned in him, I was now legally and spiritually made righteous in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:12-21; 6:4-14; 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31; 6:17). He said that I was crucified with Christ 2000 years ago, and that it was no longer I that lived, but Christ lives in me; that the life I now live in my body, I live by faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20). That was my true identity. All I had to do, he said, was count that to be true. To reckon it to be true. To *appropriate* it. In essence, I was to rest in the facts and promises of God. And, he told me, I was then supposed to *act as though they are true*. Because, in reality, those facts about me *are true*. God said so.

In my humble opinion, that's biblical faith.

Bill Gillham taught me the true meaning of faith. Yes, I had saving faith. But God, in His infinite wisdom, deemed it necessary for me to return once again to the Cross. And, after reading that little paragraph in a relatively obscure manuscript that I learned about through an equally obscure podcast, I appropriated my identity in Christ, through faith in Jesus and His Word. I can now say that Christ is my life. Praise be to God that after a long journey in the wilderness, I was ultimately led to brokenness ... and the resurrection truth that Paul spoke so highly about. I praise God that I really know what it means to abide in Christ and experience the abundant life.

In closing, I must mention one thing that I learned about the abiding life through my studies. Although you would think that it would be foremost in my mind, Miles Stanford reminded me that "we are not to know the Lord Jesus in order to emulate Him as our example. Rather we are to behold Him in His Word and allow the Holy Spirit of God to conform us on to His image. Not imitation, but conformation."<sup>[1]</sup> I am to enter into the mindset of *being* and not *doing*. How many times have I heard that phrase and failed to grasp its significance and failed to understand how to truly apply it to my life? I learned that in order for me to grow I must enter His life through the Scriptures and feed on Him.<sup>[2]</sup> I am to appropriate Him. I am to *know Him*. Stanford goes on to say that "we come to know Him as He is from the vantage point of our position in Him at the Father's

right hand, and this ever by the means of His Word.”<sup>[3]</sup> I am to see how He patiently and lovingly dealt with Nicodemus and the woman at the well. I am to see how he ministered to Peter during the good times and the bad. I am to learn from Him as He presents His life-giving parables and displays His humble nature at the Last Supper. So much rich truth to saturate in. So much raw and precious material that the Holy Spirit has to work with. In essence, through this journey I have relearned the importance of the Word of God and its absolute necessity in the continuance of my progressive sanctification and my conformation to the image of Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:12; Romans 8:29).

Rob Semco  
January, 2021

[1] Miles J. Stanford, *The Complete Green Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 175.

[2] *Ibid.*, 176.

[3] *Ibid.*, 177.