

My name is Sheryl and I am 58 years old.



When we were growing up, Mom thought it best to not shape our religious beliefs but to allow us to explore and choose on our own (she was raised very strict Catholic and rebelled...ran away to get married at 16 and I, the oldest, was born when she was 17.) As a result all of us siblings have accepted Christ, on our own and practiced our faith to varying degrees.

I became "born again" shortly after my first child was born in 1982, in my early 20s. My husband followed suit within the year. We raised our 5 kids to believe in our risen savior and followed mainstream traditions. As a military family we moved around a lot and didn't have a steady family church. We attended churches here and there out of duty and obligation. Our favorite churches were a Berean Church for awhile, and then a reformed Presbyterian because they focused solely on the bible...if it wasn't in the bible it wasn't preached or practiced (they had no musical instruments...but the a capella singing was beautiful.)

Throughout those 30 or so years, although I prayed every day and tried to live as a good Christian and raising good children...but I just didn't feel the any kind of zeal. There was something missing. I always felt like I was being dutiful...but the passion for Christ wasn't in my heart. I certainly didn't understand the trinity so I didn't think about it very much. I wasn't one to go on the street and preach to everyone I met. My sister belonged to a Pentecostal church and I admired and longed for the kind of bold spirit she expressed. I truly believed in God...but I was faking it because the bible, God's holy word, just didn't make sense to me. I'd read and read but nothing sunk in. I listened to modern evangelical sermons ... J Vernon McGee, James Kennedy, and other televangelists. I sensed an unwritten taboo against looking too deeply into church history (now I know why!). I remember JWs coming to our door and I had some questions on how to answer them...our pastor at the time came over to counsel me and I remember him being annoyed and he never did give me a good answer. I think he basically told me to tell them I'm not interested, go away thank you very much.

Life went on pretty much the same. I tried to follow bible teachings in my own life. Despite being unhappy in my marriage I knew I had to stick it out. Early on I was going to take our 3 kids at the time and leave my husband but I had one of

the rare "words from God" I've experienced in my life. I was leaning over the kitchen sink with the water running so he wouldn't hear me crying and I physically felt a hand on my shoulder and the words in my head: If you stay with your husband I will bless your marriage. I did stay and things did get better (we had 2 more children) and I tried hard to believe in God's promise to me. In a worldly way, I still wasn't happy and after 26 years of marriage as soon as my youngest in his mid-teens I did ask for a divorce. If I knew then what I know now...if I would have understood the truths in the bible...I would not have left my husband. But....it is what it is.

Fast forward to about 10 years ago. I had several interests in my life...one was online friendships. I was intrigued with other cultures and history of other countries and met a happily married man in the UK. We have never met but he and his wife have become my most cherished friends. We talked about everything...and I mean everything. So of course we talked about religion. One day he asked me to show him in the bible where it says we go to heaven when we die. I was dumbstruck...what an absurd question! Of COURSE we go to heaven when we die!

Little did I know...that one little "Ah ha!" question changed my life dramatically. He was heavily influenced by JW and encouraged me in that vein...but throughout my quest I found reasons to believe JWs were not the right path for me. But I was learning that things in the bible were not what I thought...the biggest breakthrough for me was finally realizing that it was OKAY to understand that Jesus was NOT God Almighty and the bible proved this over and over again. I was astounded to think that the vast majority of believers could be wrong about so central an issue: who Jesus and God really are. It had been so ingrained in me to believe that Jesus and God were one, along with the Holy Spirit (and I could never grasp how the spirit was a person.) I started listening to different religious scholars: Anthony Buzzard, Sean Finnegan, et al. At this pivotal time I was living with the same sister (and her husband) who was still Pentecostal...speaking in tongues, being slain in the spirit (whatever that was) etc. We were very close...best of friends. Naturally I shared my new found beliefs with her....but she absolutely did not (and still does not) see things the way I do.

I was feeling torn apart....we were both so very convinced in our truths and couldn't make the other see. I prayed every night, sometimes tearfully, for the truth. How could I be right and everyone else I knew be wrong? Many family members were very religious. I had one aunt who was an ordained pastor,

another very close aunt who was a practicing Catholic. They were all very good, fruit-bearing Christians...how could they be wrong about this? But I couldn't unknow what I now knew...the toothpaste was out of the tube for good.

Gradually my unshaken belief that Jesus was not God and the trinity was wrong had an impact on my life in a very real way. My sister and her husband were contemplating kicking me out of their house (I literally had nowhere else to go... the divorce had not been good for me) because in his men's bible study when he shared what I was telling my sister, his fellows advised him I was of the devil. They didn't end up kicking me out (instead they exorcised the house, especially my bedroom, of demons) but I also didn't restrain my search for truth.

Every night I would pray in the most heartfelt way to be given wisdom and understanding. I was ready to give up everything as long as I had the truth. I also prayed in the car on my commute to work in the big city. One morning I was praying as usual and there was another of those precious "words from God." It was more of a sense...of a revelation. I felt as if I had passed some sort of test...I had an affirmation from God that I was right...I was genuinely on the path of truth.

I've never veered off since then.

Now I read the bible with crystal clear understanding, I'm not afraid to learn church history, I am willing to passionately share my beliefs and truths about God and his son. I know my family thinks I'm a heretic, but we all love each other and have accepted each other. I am constantly thinking about God, the Kingdom to come, Jesus' life and sacrifice, what it all means. I pray that I can live my life as an example of God's love and mercy...and if I can be just called a good and faithful servant at the end....I will be overjoyed.