

Jim Jung

Salvation Testimony

Thank you for allowing me to share my faith testimony, and for taking the time to read it. Of course, it would be even better if we can exchange both of our stories in person! Lord willing, perhaps we can one day.

The Unreligious Family

For all account, I was born into a non-religious household and was raised in a typically secular fashion. But I have had some “brushes” with churches early on.

I went to a kindergarten run by a local catholic church. Whenever I was particularly troublesome, I was sent along with an older girl in the neighbourhood to a church for a streak of few Sundays. My mother was hoping for a quick behavioural reform. I rather enjoyed receiving newcomer’s gifts of pencils and stickers. One summer I even signed myself up for Vacation Bible School on my walk back home from the local swimming pool. I still remember the puppet stories of Noah, Abraham and Moses, like old photographs from childhood. Like this, I was a church “outsider” peering over the walls and staring at steeples. Quite literally, I remember playing on top of a sandpile across from a church one warm Sunday morning, wondering why all these people were dressed up and going into a

building looking all jolly and excited with their whole family in tow; and the sound of church bells ringing added to that otherworldly sensation. Here I was playing



Listening to Kookaburra, king of the bush...

on a dirt pile while my parents were just sleeping in on Sunday morning. I was born in 1968 in Seoul, South Korea.

Eternity in My Heart

When I was ten years old, our family of four, including my younger sister, moved to the U.S., and settled in Los Angeles, California. I had almost finished fifth grade, but arriving in November (25th 1978 to be exact), I had to practically repeat the grade—but my English needed much longer to catch up to my completely new environment. In sixth grade, I was bused to a nicer suburban school in Studio City from our urban downtown ethnic enclave. It was an experimental program that I would later learn in a sociology class as “desegregating busing”. But on those commutes to the whiter nicer neighbourhood school, surrounded by other black, Hispanic and other Asian kids, I daydreamed endlessly about what’s “out there.”. Beyond the bus window, across from Universal Studio and far across our solar system, I wondered how far the universe stretched and what’s at the end, and what’s stopping it, and if that is God that I had heard about from those brief church visits. The ideal of eternity fascinated me to no end.

For junior high school, my parents moved us out to Riverside in San Bernardino County. We were the only Asian family in a completely Caucasian town—back then. I was the only Asian kid in my school, and so was my sister in her elementary. Other than that, life was great. But for high school, we moved again, but this time closer back towards Los Angeles in a suburb called Hacienda Heights, which was a bit more diverse, but nowhere near as Asian-concentrated as it became after I left for college. I had a fine teen life as a happy jock in varsity swimming and water polo team. Then in summer between 10th and 11th grade my cousin visited for a few days. As we were about to fall asleep one night, he started to share about Jesus and the cross. Very quickly I shut him up with some choice words and expressed how offended I was that he tried to convert me into some silly religion. I told him to, “Just roll over and go to sleep.” But I couldn’t sleep. I was kept awake all night by all those thoughts of eternity and life beyond this world, and the origin of where life came from. The next morning, I was too embarrassed to ask my cousin about the gospel, so I asked him if his church had cute girls. That was less embarrassing for a teenager. On the first visit to that church in Los Angeles, I found out that another friend who live a block away from me also attend the same church. So then with his family I started to regularly attend church from that day forward. And I never stopped going.

The Dark Night of the Soul

I had lots of questions for my Sunday school teachers from day one. I knew I was not a Christian yet, but I was looking for a reason to believe, but the reason had to be absolutely rock-solid. For two years, until graduating from high school, I went to every worship, bible studies, retreats and church events seeking for a reason to believe. But it was at a retreat I learned that a finite created mind cannot fully comprehend the infinite Creator. So then I conceded. This was my version of “faith” at

the time. I had become a “theist” because there appeared to be more design and intentionality in universe than not. The gospel of Jesus was still too fuzzy at this time.

It took another two years in college, and more sermons and bible studies and experimenting in social sinning and confronting of my own self-righteousness to start focusing on the person of Jesus who appeared to be the central character in the Bible. The “Liar-Lunatic-or-Lord” question loomed and was closing in on me. At the start of my sophomore year, I took a bunch of elective classes that had nothing to do with my major of Economics, just to satisfy my religious curiosities and to look for a “way out.” I was hoping that the world of academia had figured out a way to debunk Jesus. So, I took Astronomy, Western Civilisation, and Physical Anthropology—which is the study of human physiological evolution. I did very well in all these unnecessary classes because I was supremely interested in the subject matters. But to my disbelief, everything, if anything, supported instead the biblical claims, and dispelled none of them. I was not happy about this. I was really hoping to disprove God and Hell, so I can live my merry secular life and pursue worldly riches and pleasure, and be the lord and master my own destiny!

One particular month, at the start of the second semester of the sophomore year, I was starting to be really depressed. I was weighed down by this dilemma that I couldn’t shake. I hated God for not leaving me alone. I regretted ever stepping foot into church. I stopped going to all church events and fellowship meetings, except just going in and out for Sunday worship. I stopped attending campus meetings and avoided all Christians. It was the darkest and the heaviest time for my soul.

The Light at the End

On one afternoon, a random student handed me a small pocket booklet of the Gospel of John on my way back to the apartment. I rolled my eyes, took it, and put it in the back pocket of my jeans. That night was particularly harrowing, and I may even have encountered a “divine moment” which I was too afraid to face. I just remembered gritting my teeth and pleading, “Leave me alone!” The next morning, I had already forgotten all about the rough sleep, and headed to my first 8am class, of course wearing the same jeans as a typical college student. But on the bike ride I felt the booklet against my backside. Once I got to the class, I got it out to read: “In the beginning was the Word...”. I couldn’t put it down. I went to the next class and to the next, and I have no idea what any of the professors were lecturing on that day. But the person of Jesus Christ and the Judean countryside came alive through the scriptures. The apostles and all the characters were vivid. I could imagine the tone of Christ’s voice and expressions on His face, and I could no longer deny that Jesus is everything the Bible claims Him to be! By the time I finished the Gospel of John, I was in front of my school library overlooking the campus vista from an elevated platform. I was weeping tears of joy at having met my Master and Maker and Saviour of my soul. It was like the brightest light at the end of a very long dark tunnel. I confessed at that moment, “I’ll go anywhere and do anything for you!” I didn’t know I was making a missionary commitment at that time, but nothing was off the table because Christ is the Lord!

“⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” [Rom.10:8-10]

Epilogue (Redemption Retrospect)

They say, “hindsight is 20/20.” But that’s being generous. When it comes to divine hand in history, even the hindsight is terribly blurred. However, searching God’s hand in the past does reveal more of His sovereign wisdom, power and generosity than if we weren’t looking at all. Like predestination, retrospective theological reflection deepens our appreciation of God’s love and grace.

Within the first year as a newly minted Christian, I was able to share the gospel with my mom and lead her to a church where she then became a believer and was baptised. She also told me in that first year that she used to regularly attend church and Sunday school all through her teenage years. Then she met a rebel of a guy (my father) who swept her away, and she never looked back at church. But God used her son to bring her back.

My father who lost both his parents early and left home at a young age rarely ever talked about his growing up. I knew precious little of his side of the family. But later I learned that my paternal grandmother whom I never met was a very devout Christian lady, and that she was a woman of prayer, and that she used to drag my father by his ear to church. As a boy, he hated church, and did everything in his power to try to stay away, and when his mother passed away, he thought he had gotten away.

My father was a hard working honest man, but he never had any kind things to say about church and Christians, especially about pastors. In fact, he had many derogatory things to say about all of them. In the early days of my church involvement, he made jokes. But unlike most Asians parents, mine were quite liberal to allow us kids to make our own life choices as we saw fit, that which made us happy. So, he didn’t tell us not to go to church, but he made it clear that he wasn’t supportive. But as I chose to go to seminary, and become a pastoral intern, he started to hold back some of his denigrating comments, I’m sure out of his love for his son. But God used this “muzzling” to quietly work on his heart. By the time I graduated from seminary and became a pastor, for the first time he gave up his weekend fishing and started attending a church with my mother. When we committed to become missionaries overseas, he became a baptised believer. On the night we were to depart, at the dinner table, for the first time, he offered to pray as the head of the household of faith. There was not a dry eye during and moments after the prayer.