

## **Women's Conference 2017 - Wholly Devoted 9/23/17pm 'Love God with All your Mind'**

This is not an easy subject to talk about but if it helps someone then it is well worth it. I am going to share about my journey through homosexuality or you may call it being gay. I am no expert but I want to give my testimony of what the Lord did for me.

**Mark 12:30 says, Love the Lord your God, with all your HEART and, with all your SOUL and, with all your MIND and, with all your STRENGTH.** I've given examples of how God **healed my broken heart** after the death of my mother, how God **restored my wounded soul** resulting from sexual abuse and now I want to share how He **lit up the darkness in my mind.** I believe that God provides a way out of even the most difficult or impossible situations if we give Him the opportunity.

This may be a topic you have had no experience with personally but the same God Who delivered me can deliver you from whatever it is.

**I want people to know how much God loved me during that time, how patient He was with me yet He never went back on His Word, never changed His mind about right and wrong, He just loved me through it and led me out of it. There is no one like Him!**

What is He loving you through, trying to lead you out of or into?

**Daniel 9:9 The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against Him.** All gone astray, gotten lost in some area. Come back! He's merciful, kind, loving and forgiving.

There are many people in this lifestyle today and there are lots of stories as to how. I am not here to debate those but to say GOD is well able to change us if we let HIM.

The enemy tells us we can't- God says we **can do all things through Him!** We feel it's impossible- God says **nothing shall be impossible with Him!** Looks like there is no way out- God says **He will provide a way of escape!** We must know what God says in HIS word to know what is true, then trust Him to show you how, to provide what you need and to do the impossible!

No one avoids difficulty but God helps us through it. The enemy takes a difficulty and makes it worse. I was in the midst of sexual abuse and alcoholism. I was so confused. There was no outlet for my emotions, no trusted adults, isolated, in an unfamiliar town/home. I missed mom, felt unloved. **It was a low point. I had no connection with the Lord there, no church, no connection to the bible.**

When I have Him close, I have right thinking, I'm strengthened to do what He asks. The Bible keeps me on course. It's filled with hope, love, direction, strength and solutions! The church supports me- instruction, fellowship, friends who point us in the right direction, give Biblical wisdom, pray with me. **James 5:16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.** Conviction brings repentance, offers a way out but I was under shame!

**So, I am in this low point, subject to wrong thinking, an easy target for attack.** I was looking for ways to be gone and I joined this group and some of them hung out at this house. I was about 14-15 and I was told about the gay lifestyle. I was so naïve. I was shocked.

Processing new information on our own can lead to error, wrong solutions. Only God is never wrong! Family, friends, society, our own minds, even experience - all tell us things, many times conflicting things - we must have something solid, firm, true to count on, look to, be led by and it's the Lord, it's Scripture. God tells us who we are, who we can be in Him, who the enemy is, how to resist, how to have victory, how to receive His blessings and live our life with joy! He has the best plan, the right way and He provides what we need, He will help us through it, whatever it is!

I handled this information on my own. I talked with my friend and things were fitting together from my past. I began to remember things in new ways. We find what we look for, what we want to see. It was a **crossroads** for me and over time the shock was gone. I was in the lifestyle.

Stop flirting with danger, stop thinking you are so strong, you will never fall to this or that. It is only our closeness to Him that gives us warning, opens our eyes, draws us to safety. If we find ourselves in things we never dreamed we would be, don't run away from God! Run to Him!

The devil sounds like he cares, he understands, he's our friend. He entices us by telling us it will be fine, this is the answer, there is no other way - then if we regret it, he beats us up with guilt and shame driving a wedge between us and God. Maybe he tells you it's God's fault this happened God let you down by not stopping this. Says we have no choice, that God doesn't care about us. It's a lie, God loves us! HE is the only one Who does understand and is able to give us victory!

I felt remorse at first but unacted upon, remorse fades. Everybody wants love and affection but there are many wrong ways to fill that desire. God wants us to have love, HE created us for that but follow His way. God loves me unconditionally. HE loves me in spite of my weaknesses and disobedience. HE loves me enough to tell when I'm wrong, when I need to change.

I thought this lifestyle might help but it didn't. It did not address my real issues. I took them with me. I might appear fine but I was still unhappy unsatisfied with life. I hid behind busyness, fun and drank to have a 'good time.' I lived for the party but parties end and your left with your thoughts, with real life again.

I felt my dreams for my life were lost. I remembered the peace and joy I once had, how close I had been to God, how I talked to Him about everything. They were my happiest times. I felt hopelessly separated and it was my doing.

But GOD was still there, drawing me back, calling me, loving me in my mess. Many years slipped by with hardly a thought of Him. He was right there all along but I ignored Him. He never let me go but rather I let Him go and He was about to show me that, let me see who I had become.

All gone down a path or made a choice we regret there is a Way back I Tried to do  
it on my own but would fall during stress or weakness We must face, confront and EXPOSE the things we want to overcome.

I take responsibility for where I ended up. I can point to things but in the end, I had a choice. I had gotten in and didn't know how to get out. I did not like my life. I did not like the way I acted. I had known the Lord. It sounds odd but we can be so far away, we forget who we are, Whose we are, what we had, what we have been given. But God!, so rich is He in mercy, He never leaves or forsakes us!

One summer, everything changed. I was going on an end of class canoe trip and we thought the only ones going were our group of like-minded friends so it was going to be awesome! Then we discovered the morning of the trip, Michelle was going too. Michelle! I could not believe that weird girl was going to ruin our fun. Her name is Michelle Stoughton and I love to tell her name because she meant so much to my Christian life! Then I was assigned to a canoe with her! I complained out loud. I tried to pursued her not to go. Nothing worked. So, we ignored her all the way there, even being rude to her openly. We were mean girls. When we arrived my weekend got worse, the canoe partner was the tent partner too! this couldn't be happening, it was the worst thing ever! She tried talk about birds, trees and how God made such beauty. I ignored her, hated it. Made fun of her. Told to just not talk to me! She was never mean back. She put up with a lot .

I had wandered so far from how I wanted to be, I did not know it ever existed. I had forgotten the months when my mother was sick and God supplied me with the trees and birds to feel His presence, providing a place I could cry out to Him. It was all so distant. I was blind, hardened.

The trip ended and the canoe pulled up to the ramp. A handsome man get out of a car with flowers and walked to us. Michelle went to him and as he hugged her she cried. It was silent but the jerking of her shoulders gave it away. **Suddenly, I was so aware that she was a person**, that she had feelings and **I had hurt her**. It was as if I awoke from a dream. I had become cruel and mean. What had I become? How could I treat someone like that? Where had the me I used to be gone over these 10 years?

He walked her to the car, opened her door and knelt down with her a few moments. He shut her door and walked to the ramp. Oh boy, here it comes, the punishment I deserve. He will probably beat us up, especially me! As he got near, the warmest smile came over his face and he helped us load every canoe. He was kind, he was sincere. He was so like Jesus, so forgiving, so loving.

I felt awful. GOD gave me such a clear picture of who I was, of the kind of person I had become and it was ugly. I was embarrassed and ashamed. We had a four-hour van ride home and it was silent. All of us had been touched in some way. I have never heard from the other girls because our lives went different directions after this trip but I wonder – did they too change their lives? We have a choice at points like this. I spent those four-hours talking to God – how could You love me after all I've done? He did so very much, wanted me just like I was! Repenting – Lord, I'm so sorry, I don't know how I got here, forgive me, help me! **Jer 31:3 The Lord appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.** HE never gave up though I was so very far away! I broke off from that old life completely. It was hard, lonely for a time but He opened doors, leading me to new friends and a church. He got me over every hurdle!

**Proverbs 28:13 Whoever hides his transgressions will not succeed, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will find mercy.**

I was longing to find Michelle and tell her how sorry I was, to try to correct the terrible wrong I had inflicted on her but when she drove away from that ramp, I never saw her again. School was out and my chance was gone.

We do not always get to go back and right the wrongs we have done to others but we can be forgiven and we can let Him change us so we do not make the same mistake again. We can pray for those we hurt and ask God to make it right. The very best thing we can do is to press on in following Jesus. That is how we truly change the past and the future!

We can feel so far from Him that we think it would be too hard, take too long to return. That is a lie from the enemy. It can happen suddenly! GOD is always near, ready to welcome us back!

Don't give up. Don't quit. Tell Him your hurts and fears. Aren't you tired of being miserable, tired of hiding what's inside? Let Him help you. Stop listening to the lies that say you can't. You can with His help!

Don't give up on that wayward child or that lost relative either. God can UNDO in an instant what took YEARS to build and he can BUILD in an instant what it took years to TEAR DOWN. It might look bad but hold on to your faith, hold on to His Word. Love them where they are! God has so much more than we can imagine and HE had a surprise for me!

**Three months later,** at that great little spirit filled church a friend had suggested, God brought my eyes to rest on a girl I recognized even from the back. It was Michelle. I could not believe it. There she was just rows ahead of me. **God is so awesome and He never ceases to amaze me!** I had longed for, prayed for a chance to tell her how sorry I was, to tell her how I became such a mess, to let her know the outcome of that trip. I was afraid to approach her. I felt GOD was providing an opportunity and what would I do with it. I walked to her as soon as service ended not knowing if she would faint or scream. When she saw me, her eyes had a brief look of shock but true to her faith, she quickly turned it to a soft look of wonder. She was only 20, so young for such grace, such love. Isn't God wonderful. I spoke quickly, saying how very sorry I am, how lost I had been, not even remembering I had ever known God, how her behavior opened my eyes! I thanked her. I asked her to forgive me and of course she did. I offered to find another church so as not to ruin hers but she was so glad I was there, wanted me to stay!

Isn't God wonderful! He is always at work in our lives if we would just listen! I don't know where I would be without Him! I love Him so!

Are you still suffering from the past? Are you still being beat up for mistakes? Are you stuck in a destructive behavior or emotion? Are you tried of going around the same hurts and struggles repeatedly? Tired of a life of less! Then come to Him. Repent. **Let Him renew your mind, change your life!**

He loves you right where you are and will help you become who He created you to be. Don't let fear keep you down. Let your past become your testimony! Don't let this moment pass you by, grab a friend and come together!

Is it a loved one you are concerned about? Come pray for them, seek what God would have you do.

Leave behind your regrets and mistakes, come today there's no reason to wait! Bring your sorrows and trade them for joy, from the ashes a new life is born! Oh, Come to the alter, the Father's arms are open wide.

He died to provide us with so much, don't refuse to accept it, use all it provides, live it! He will help you, show you, support, encourage and strengthen you! How do we allow that to be taken from us, how do we let go of what is so good, so wonderful? Take it back!

Our pastor says, 'Sin takes you farther than you wanted to go, it keeps you longer than you wanted to stay, and it costs you more than you wanted to pay.' Stop. Turn around. Cry out to Him. The alter is open. Don't let pride or fear hold you back.