

From Going to a Catholic Priest To Jesus Christ, My Great High Priest

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Good morning. My name is Diego Medina. I grew up in Puerto Rico. And growing up, I have no recollection of my dad ever speaking about spiritual things or going to church. And growing up, I think we went to church - Catholic church - 4 or 5 times a year. I remember having to go to do my first communion. So I had to go take the classes. So my recollection growing up of a spiritual life was going to church when it was the major holidays. And as I prepared for my first communion, learning that to be right with God, you'd go and confess your sins, do a couple "Hail Mary's" and "Holy Fathers" and you're forgiven. And it's a cycle. You go sin again and go back and confess.

And growing up, I think I was about 14 years old when I realized that if that was the case, every time I prayed the Lord's Prayer, I was condemning myself even more because at the end it says, "Father, forgive my trespasses, just as I forgive those who trespass against me." So I felt that the smart thing to do at the time was to change the Lord's Prayer. And I changed my prayer as "Lord, forgive my sins and teach me to forgive others." And I thought at the time that put me in a better place.

Then something happened growing up with my priest - the pastor of the Catholic church I was going to. He made a pass and we had a relationship that wasn't God-honoring. And at the time, I realized, why am I going to a man that is as sinful and as fallen as me to be right with God? So, with not knowing anything really about Christ and what He did for me, I started confessing myself in private trying to seek peace with God.

Then I grew up, joined the Air Force, and completely forgot about church, about God. During that time of those four years in the Air Force, I used to be very moral in appearance. I remember being proud of my mom being proud of me. I don't know if that makes sense. So being taken from that environment where my mom was an overseer and my family and trying to live up to their standards and their expectations - taken away from that and going to Okinawa where nobody knew me and nobody had any expectations, the Lord used those four years to really show me the sin that was in me. I couldn't recognize the man that I became during that time. All the sexual immorality and all the things that I did that were so sinful. And if my mom or my family would have known I would have been so ashamed. But at the same time, I was glad that they would never find out.

So I have no problem. And through all that, I have no concern about what God was thinking of me and how I was increasing God's wrath in my own life by my choices. I came back to the states, lost my job. After I got out of the Air Force, I got a civilian job. Lost my job. By God's providence, came to San Antonio for a job offer. At the time, I only had one family member living here. She was a professing Christian. And I had no friends in San Antonio, so I started going over to her house. And it was good food. As a single man, I loved that. She had Bible studies, so I started going to the Bible studies. And I continued my life of partying and

sexual immorality, doing business that was crooked, and just trying to make money and pursue financial freedom.

And as I start going to the Bible studies, I remember I had a Bible, so I started reading my Bible. And I started reading from Genesis and came across the commandments. Something happened as I started reading God's laws and started reading about His 10 Commandments, I started seeing in my life how I was not living up to them. I started changing myself. I wanted to be good. I started changing the way I behaved, my night life - put it to the side. And I tried to reform myself. And I felt good for about a month - maybe two months, and I saw how impotent I was of keeping God's laws and how my conscience would tell me how guilty I was before God and how futile my efforts of reforming myself were.

I remember coming one night from the clubs. It was 2 o'clock in the morning. I walk into an empty house. I felt great as I was with my friends dancing and partying and everything. The moment I walked into my house I was confronted with the fact that I'm not right before God. And I'd been trying to be right before God for so many months in my own strength, and knowing that the more I tried, the more condemned I was before Him; the more sinful and the more deserving of His wrath and punishment and going to hell - definitely, I was sure that it was the right thing for my life. And I was tired. And I remember falling on my knees and crying out and telling God I can't do it on my own. And if You don't save me, I have no hope. And things started to make sense the next day. I was able to go to bed, got up, and I felt a relief and a hope. I didn't understand what it was at the time. I'm driving and I saw a church and I felt that the very next step - the logical step, the right thing to do was to go to church.

So I go to church and I met my brother Richard in that church. And my Friday's became from going out partying to going to his house and studying the Scriptures. And it was such a beautiful time to read the Word of God and understand for the first time in my life who Christ was and what He accomplished for me. And how I didn't have to try to reform myself, and how I didn't have to try in my own strength to be right before God, but how I was able to trust in Christ and His promise of working in me and changing my heart and giving me new desires which I was able to see right from the beginning that He had given it. I was spending Friday nights with other single men studying the Word of God until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning and it was sweet. It was good. A week before that, a month before that I would have thought those guys were crazy so definitely the Lord was changing me. And it's just growing in knowing, in appreciating what He has done for me.

I always share how in the beginning I thought that my sins were that big. Therefore, Christ dying on the cross was that big - just enough to cover my sins. And as a single man growing in my faith, I believed that I'd conquered my sins and I was righteous. And then the Lord gave me a wife which has been such a blessing, but the Lord has used her in our dynamic, in our relationship to show that He has so much work to do in my life. And the thing that I thought I'd conquered, He exposed it. He showed me how selfish I still was; how short-tempered; how sinful. And I remember looking back and saying wait a minute - so if my sins are not that big, but they're this big, I have no hope. But yet, being able to look at Christ and appreciating how His dying on the cross was not that big, but infinitely bigger.

And as I'm learning my life as a Christian discovering things as the Lord revealed them that were still in my life - that sinful nature; those things that were not pleasing to Him and being

able to see that that sin was so much greater in my life than what I thought. It was good to be able to see that Christ dying on the cross is so much bigger. His righteousness is able to cover all my sins.

And ever since, it's been a journey of putting sin to death and discovering how many more I have to work and bring to the cross and plead with the Lord to put to death. But the hope and the assurance that He promised that He will finish the good work that He started in me and that He has already ordained good works for me to fulfill. And I can do them as long as I remember that Christ's righteousness is sufficient for the peace that I enjoy with Christ. And I don't have to worry as I was a young man having to go back and confess and finding hope in another man and my work. But my hope is in Christ and His finished work. And I can enjoy peace with God. As I continue growing in my walk, that's my hope and that's my testimony. Amen.