

Talking Points

Hi, I'm Mark,

I became a Christian, coming to the Lord, the last week of October 2017. Going through my experience, I now understand when I hear a lot of times that people come to the Lord out of desperation and pain, because that's where I was. I was brought up Catholic, in Catholic schools, and attended church with my family until I entered high school. At that point, by my own doing, God fell off the radar for me. He stayed off my radar until October 2017.

By 2017, my wife and I had been together for 14 years, married for the last three of those years. She has been a Christian since she was 23. Her Christianity had strengthened during the past eight years, and she has an extremely good relationship with God.

Fast forward to October, where my wife told me find somewhere else to stay for a while. I was so clueless, I had no idea why. Within a couple of days, I meet with our marriage therapist that we saw together a couple of times before, but I did not take seriously. Again, thinking I wasn't the problem, it's my wife. I told the therapist that I really messed things up this time. She pointed out several things about me that made me think. At the end of the session, she asked me a couple of very impactful questions. She asked me how my relationship with God was. I answered that I was spiritual and that I believed in God, but that I don't go to church or read the bible (I hated reading & found it boring). Then she asked me how I viewed my wife's relationship with God. I said she is very close to God, she goes to church, studies the bible, and reads daily devotions. Then a lightning bolt question; if your wife had to pick a life with you, or a life with God, who do you think she would pick? I answered that she'd pick God.

In text messages back and forth, my wife mentioned how she did not want to be married, that I had no real interest in her, mentioning she was fearful of my anger and my need to control. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was basically treating friends & acquaintances better than my wife, the person I'm supposed to love and care for the most. My marriage was heading for divorce, this was my desperation point. So that evening when I was at home alone I cried out to God: Why? Then I cried for His help and guidance. While I was trying to compose myself, thinking about my earlier session with the therapist, as well as my next move, I thought about the one or two times, some time ago, I attended Saddleback church services with my wife. I then felt compelled to look up the previous weekend's online worship service. It was about how to pray. I spent the next couple of hours talking to God and He answered back by guiding me through the Saddleback website to find information about Celebrate Recovery (CR) and the Men On The Edge (MOTE) a support group to help men struggling in their marriage. I spent the week watching previous online services. The following Friday, I attended my first CR meeting, Sunday's service, and right after that, my first MOTE meeting.

I started to realize that I had some serious character defects, and committed myself to make some serious changes. I started to understand that I was on this Earthly world to love God, others, and to serve Him with Christ-like character. I wanted to change (repent), make things right with God, be a better man and hopefully, if it wasn't too late, a better husband. I recognized change (repentance) meant a life style change. I even got a nudge from God, when later that same week, my favorite classic radio station changed its format to Christian music. I took that as another sign and embraced it full-heartily. I attended the next MOTE meeting, where I purchased the book (*Don't Give Up!*), I read it cover to cover in less than week (remember I hated reading). What an eye opener the book was for me. For whatever reason, I thought sinning were things like murder, adultery, and stealing. The book taught me that anger, selfishness, and controlling were sins as well.

Talking Points

M.O.T.E.

Men on the Edge

Wisdom for a Healthy Marriage

As I was progressing on becoming a changed man, I informed my wife about my realizations and awakening to change. I asked her if she would like to go to the next service with me, she said she was not ready to be with me. Sensing she was skeptical about my change, I told her I understood. I remember the service was about focusing on being humble as a condition to healing & restoration. I left the service feeling that they were talking directly to me. I continued to attend CR, MOTE, and worship services by myself, waiting for the next CR step study to begin.

Three weeks later, while it was my turn to be home, I was preparing for a medical procedure that was going to happen in a couple of days. I called my wife asking her to drive me to and from the office. She said, she would and asked if she could drop off some groceries in about an hour. I said no problem. When she came to house, I asked her if it was okay if I could talk to her before she left. She said yes. I started talking about how I had read the MOTE book, *Don't Give Up!* and showed her highlighted portions of the book that had a huge impact on me. I also talked about how attending CR and worship services were guiding me through my change to having a serious relationship with God and how I was planning to start a step study. I talked about how all the meetings I've been attending, along with seeing our therapist, are accountability tools to help me stay on course for sustained change. I said to her that regardless of our future together, that I was committed to be a new man. She was happy to hear about my change, but still wasn't sure about our future. I proposed that after my medical procedure, if she would allow me to live in the house again, but in separate rooms. She said okay, she was willing to give it a try.

Over the next few weeks, she was witnessing the change I was going through, such as continuing to attend my church group meetings and seeing our therapist, she ask if we could go to worship service together. Of course I said yes. After the service we had an impromptu date night. It felt like a loving couple and not a roommate situation, later that night she was okay with me staying in the same room as her. As time went on, she continued to witness my commitment to sustained change as I started my step study, quiet time with the bible, and a lot less TV. We attended Saddleback Church membership classes 101 through 401 together. After accepting Christ in October 2017, and I got baptized two months later, on December 10, 2017.

We are enrolled in Saddleback's church counseling training classes, graduating in September 2019, and God willing, we will be able to minister as church counselors. I look back on what it took for me to come to the Lord, and acknowledge that all the pain and despair I went through was not wasted. I finish with this verse from Romans 5:3-4 (NLT) *"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation"*.

Hope this helps you,
Mark