

Michael Proctor's Spiritual Journey

Family: Born in St. Louis at the same hospital and delivered by the same doctor as my wife Bobbie; which we discovered when taking our birth certificates to get our marriage certificate. We have two sons and a daughter who are married to wonderful spouses and have children - three grandsons and two granddaughters who are spread out in St. Louis, Michigan, and Maine.

Testimony: I was raised in a church environment where I had a desire to know God personally, but had no understanding of how to enter into such a relationship. In college I pursued a profession as an economist, and at the age of 28 as a young economics professor at Purdue University I felt I was missing meaning in my life. At that time God brought a man into my path that showed me what it meant to have a personal relationship with God, and I prayed to receive Jesus Christ as my Savior (the WAY to have my sins forgiven, that I might enter into a personal relationship with God).

Bobbie and I began our life-long journey in small group Bible study where we learned how to study the Word of God, seeing that the application of that Word to our lives was not a restraint on how to live, but that it was growing in Christ-likeness. One of our favorite verses is from Paul's letter to the Philippians 4:8. *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.* What is worthy of praise is the goodness of God revealed in the truth and grace of Jesus Christ.

Ministry: We raised our family in Columbia Missouri, which is my home town. There we participated in ministry, first at Lutheran Churches and then at an Evangelical Free Church (E-Free). In addition to starting small group Bible studies I was on the Elder board in both churches, helped lead worship and taught a small church at E-Free on Sunday mornings. Both Bobbie and I went on Mission trips to Craiova Romania, where we helped with a church plant. In 2000 I was asked to help teach a two week discipleship course in Kazan Tatarstan at an Evangelical Free Church of America (EFCA) church plant. In 2003 we moved to St. Louis and started attending First Free where I first became involved in mentoring other men. Later on we discovered that First Free had an instrumental role in planting the church in Kazan. I have since made several trips back to Kazan, once to teach on church eldership and then, along with Bobbie, to help lead in their winter student retreats. During this time I served on the Elder Board at First Free, and had the privilege of teaching fourth and fifth graders at the EFCA's Euro-Asia mission staff retreat held in Poland, as well as teaching Kid Connection's Kindergarten class during the summer, while Bobbie taught the fourth and fifth grade girls.

Christian Growth: While small group Bible study had become a foundational part of our lives, a study we participated in here at First Free became a part of our deeper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ (I have had the privilege to be one of the teachers of these courses entitled GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION and SONSHIP). Growing in Christ-likeness is a product of the work of the Holy Spirit who reveals to us ever increasing levels of the holiness of God and at the same time, ever increasing levels of our sinfulness and need for Jesus - Jesus increases and we decrease. In this way spiritual growth through the Lordship of Christ is all about His increasing acceptance, presence and participation in our lives.

I recall a saying from Rick Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Life*: *"It's not about you. ... It all starts with God."* Not only does our relationship with Christ start with Him (His love for us demonstrated by His death on the cross for us), but also our growth in our relationship with Jesus is more and more about Him. *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father; that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God..* (Ephesians 3:14, 16-19)