

In April of 2003 I experienced the change of a lifetime. Being completely broken down I had nowhere where to turn. This is my life changing story how I went from the top of a mountain, to the darkest valley, and now above the mountain and on the clouds.

It all started in the Spring of 2002. Amanda and I decided to start trying to have a baby. It was one of those, "let's just see what happens." After the first 6 months of trying, nothing. Amanda would start to ask what was going on and I really wasn't concerned. During this time we signed a loan to build a house in Nickelsville. It took about two months to get the final paperwork and house plans finalized. But we finally started. Just after we dug out for the basement, I received a phone call from my younger brother Jonathan who was serving in the Army at Fort Hood, TX. His phone call shocked me. He was being sent to Iraq for no less than one year. This was the start of things piling up on me.

Amanda and I were staying on top of the house project and all seemed to be going well. The builders just finished pouring the footers to our house. That evening we went back to our rental house and found some devastating news in the mail. We discovered that my two previous paychecks had bounced. Imagine how we felt, trying to build a house, pay contractors and now my paychecks were bouncing. Not really knowing exactly what to do, I reluctantly changed jobs. What I didn't know was how they conducted their payroll. Employees would be paid every other week but they withhold the first paycheck. This means that I went six weeks before receiving a paycheck. It was a very trying time. I was devastated. I didn't know what to do. I and Amanda went from eating out frequently to packing our lunch and eating at our parents as much as possible. From frequent shopping trips to not being able to afford the gas, and gas then was \$1.70.

After working at my new job for nearly two months I received a phone call from my sister Wendy. Both my grandparents were being admitted to the hospital. Nothing too serious, it was just a precaution. They had different symptoms and granny was released the next day. Granddaddy however started getting worse. In February I lost the icon of my life. My granddaddy, Jack Johnson, passed away. Again, all this pressure just kept piling on me and the burden was great. I wouldn't talk about it either. I just wanted to be left alone.

It was the day of the wake that I got news that I had gotten a job with the local school system. I was ecstatic. Finally, the job of a lifetime. I get to work on computers for the schools and get off for the summers. It was great. I did know that school systems only pay their employees once a month but I didn't know they withhold the first paycheck. This means that we were already living tight enough but I was going to have to go another 6 weeks without a paycheck while still building a house. This was tuff. I thought I had all that I could take. All of this was going on and every night Amanda would ask what is

going on, why are we not pregnant yet. I told myself that I couldn't take it anymore. I was ready to get out of this mess. I was not aware how ready I was.

We both have some great parents; they all invited us to their houses many, many times to eat. And every time we left they always made sure we took plenty of leftovers. On Tuesday April 15 after receiving leftovers we went to our rental home to settle down for the night. Amanda started again, "you think there is something wrong with us we should be getting pregnant". I lost it. I was sick and tired of hearing it. I looked at her and said, 'why don't we just pray for a baby.'" "Lets just pray and ask God for a baby." Amanda turned to me and said the harshest words I have ever been told. She said God is not going to hear our prayers. Her statement was like a knife that went straight through my heart. I became so angry with her. I finally had to get up. I didn't sleep at all that night. I went to work the next day all cranky and even one of my coworkers asked me what was going on. Very bitterly I told him nothing I am fine. I really was far from fine.

That evening we had promised Amanda's parents that we would go to church with them at Riggs Chapel in Rye Cove Virginia. What they didn't tell us is that a revival was going on. We arrived late because I hated to sing those songs. When we went inside they were still singing. We finally sat down and it all started. One man opened up the services. He was started talking about what a tuff time he had been having lately and how God had helped him and his family overcome it. When I heard it I became full of rage. I thought that my in-laws had tipped these people off. I thought they told these people that we had no money and trying to build a house. And that we were unsuccessfully trying to have a baby. My Brother was in brother in Iraq. My praised granddaddy had died. I said how dare them talk about us like this. It is none of their business.

Then some singers came forward to sing songs. And they too began to sing songs about God being in control and that He would never leave us, nor forsake us. I became even more angry. I was so mad at my in-laws I could not stand it. The singers finally sat down but this young preacher got up. And every word that man said went straight to me. It came close to the end and I was squirming and sweating. Amanda even asked me if I was alright. I told her to leave me alone, I am fine! Then that preacher asked those same singers to come back and sing. And I said to myself, just five more minutes. Hold on for five more minutes. I am going to leave this church and I will never step in church ever again. Just hold on for five more minutes. I began to shake even more; the anger inside me was raging, just waiting to explode.

And then that preacher said something I will never forget. He said, if you feel like something is not right with your heart. Maybe you can't put your finger on but you know something is just not right.

You can't explain it but you know something has gotten a hold of you. He said, that is not me and my words causing that. It's not the singers or anyone else here either. If you feel that in your hearts, and feel that drawing, that is the Heavenly Father drawing you to Him. Immediately I knew what I needed. For the first time in my life I realized that I was lost. I needed to be saved. I reached up in front of me to grab the pew in front of me to pick myself up and Amanda knocked me down. She beat me to the altar. I asked God to forgive me of all my sins and to help me live the rest of the days of my life for Him. That night was April 16, 2003. We submitted our lives to Christ and have been serving Him ever since.

Don't get the wrong idea. We were still broke and had all the same problems and we still do. We are not perfect Christians, just saved. But God did some amazing things. We finished our house in September and moved in on the 23rd. In October we found out that we were going to have a baby. I finally understood the verse so many people quote Hebrews 13:5, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.