

From ~~Religion~~ to Relationship

The testimony of Megan Ledbetter Stewart



*But seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness; and all these things
shall be added unto you.*

MATTHEW 6:33 (KJV)

“From Religion to Relationship”

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Hello, my name is Megan Stewart. Most people know me by my maiden name Megan Ledbetter. I grew up in East Tennessee in a small town in Morgan County where everyone knows everyone. Anyone who has lived in a small town knows there are advantages and disadvantages to knowing everyone. Most people know your business before you get home, and if they don't, they often make it up. This testimony is not about defending or making right my past, because I was guilty of the majority of it. This testimony is to share what the Lord has done since I learned how to have a relationship with Him instead of religion, and what He will do for anyone that is needing to break free from religion and begin a relationship.

I always thought my testimony was how God loved me enough to protect me and forgive me through all my sins. Through the drinking, the drugs, pre-marital sex, affairs, lies, basically if it is a sin, I probably did it. I always thought that was my testimony. He did love me, protect me, and deliver me from the life of sin I was living in, but that is not the testimony He wants me to share.

Growing up we went to church a lot. I can remember almost all the red hymnal songs because that was the book used mostly at the churches I attended. I am not naming any churches or denominations or people in this testimony, because I have seen a form of religion in almost all of them, including myself. I think a lot of it is passed down from generation to generation. It's often a case of, “This is how we've always done it” so that is how it continues to whatever extent. I never realized that I didn't have a relationship with Jesus until the age of forty-three.

My entire life, even when I was doing “the things” I thought I was supposed to do that supposedly made me a Christian, I still had an empty feeling. A feeling of “there has to be something more to life than this.” I couldn't figure out what was so great about being in a relationship with Jesus if this was how it felt. I couldn't figure it out because I was NOT in a relationship with Jesus; I was in a relationship with religion.

At forty-three, I was working at a prison as a non-licensed drug and alcohol counselor when I met a man by the name of Mike Stewart. He was incarcerated at the prison I worked at. He was a CPRS and held faith-based groups at the prison. Every day I would see this man who is in prison carrying his Bible, praying with people, offering hope, speaking the name of Jesus to everyone he encountered. He always had a smile on his face. He was a bright light in a very dark place. Little did I know that the Lord was using him to reach me.

I had never in my entire life seen anyone love Jesus the way he does. I had never seen someone go “all in” following Jesus until I met him. I must say at first some of the things I witnessed him do were uncomfortable because they didn't fall under the rules of religion I was

accustomed to. He wouldn't quieten down to pray or go to a private place or just tell someone he would pray for them. Any time anyone came up to him and asked him for prayer, it happened right then at that moment, and it didn't matter who was around. His knowledge of the Bible was mind-blowing to me and no matter what anyone was talking about, he would always bring Jesus into the conversation and say, "the Bible says" and turn right to a page that was related to the conversation. The pure love for Jesus that I saw in him was something I had never seen in anyone in any church or anywhere outside of the prison, yet the Lord showed it to me through this man in prison.

One day I was sitting in the office, and the Lord spoke to me as clear as could be, "You say you love me, but why are you not as happy as this man when you speak of me?" My heart was crushed. In that moment I knew I had been living a lie. I knew I believed Jesus was real, but I had no relationship with Him, I had religion. I pleaded with all my heart for the Lord to give me the relationship this man had with Him, and in doing so, I would surrender ALL.

Through obedience to Christ, I started noticing changes. I went from "I really don't want to read the Bible but I will just to say I have" to "Lord, please teach me, please help me understand your Word" and apply it to my walk. Cuss words started to feel foreign. When I said them I didn't like how it felt anymore. So I asked the Lord to help me and I stopped talking the way I used to. The vape or drink that was used before "just to take the edge off" or help me sleep became unnecessary. So I asked the Lord to take the desire from me. And He did, and I stopped. Jesus was teaching me daily how to walk with Him, and all I had to do was show up and offer Him my brokenness in exchange for His healing. It became such an honor to know that the King of Kings was taking the time to teach me how to be closer to Him. My life went from "something is missing" to a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. I could not (and still can't) get enough of Jesus, and I pray I never do!

I quit my job to help take care of my father. His health was declining due to a previous stroke. Eight months after I quit, he went on to his Heavenly home. Never in a million years would anyone have been able to convince me that I would've survived his earthly death. But the Lord had been preparing me. I was in the room with my father and watched him take his last breath on earth and at that very moment the Lord allowed me to see the beauty of his next breath in Heaven! How could I be sad over that? Maybe a bit jealous, but not sad. Of course I miss him, but I would never want him to trade where he is now for where he was. **"Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?"** – 1 Corinthians 15:55

After my father passed so did everything about the place where I grew up. I started praying about where the Lord wanted to use me and for Him to lead us to a place where His ministry and vision were over our lives. Middle Tennessee kept being spoken into my spirit. I prayed for a home in a good neighborhood in a community with like brothers and sisters in Christ who are hungry for His will and active in serving. I prayed for His will through it all. In June of 2025 we moved to Middle Tennessee, and I have never been more active in His service than I am right now. I have never been as close to Jesus as I am right now.

The man the Lord used to inspire me by being a true example of a follower became my best friend. On May 9, 2024 he became my husband as a gift of Christ through His union of marriage.

I say all of that to say this, my life is a walking testimony of Matthew 6:33. **“But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”**

I sought the things of this world to fill a void that could only be filled by Jesus Christ. I thought if I went to church, read my Bible (occasionally), put some money in the offering, and got it together (in a worldly sense...job, house, husband, kids, etc.) that I was doing the right thing. It was enough to satisfy religion, but it didn't satisfy my soul. God created us all to be made for more than an empty religion. In Jeremiah 29:11, the Bible says **“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”**

Jesus waited forty-three years for me to follow Him. I can't give you a better example of love, other than Him being crucified on a cross for all our sins. I was saved at a younger age but never taught what to do after that. I remember thinking “this is great” for about a week then it was the same because I was not following Him. I didn't do anything after asking Him to come into my heart and change me. This is where religion makes the first mistake-not teaching what comes after salvation, or better yet, what it truly means to follow Christ. You can go through the motions your whole life like I did, you can still believe God is real like I did, but if you do not seek Him with ALL your heart then you will miss out on the biggest love you will ever know. In Jeremiah 29:13 the Bible says **“And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart.”**

I do not have enough paper to tell of all the wonders the Lord has made known to me since I surrendered and went all in for Him by following Him wholeheartedly. He keeps on revealing more and more and growing me bigger and bigger in Him. You see, it wasn't too many months after I asked for my husband's portion when I first started following Jesus that I went back and said “Lord, I don't want what You have given someone else, I want the portion You intended for me.” And He continues to pour into me! Religion will keep you from the greatest relationship you will ever know. Seek the Lord first, in everything! Ask Him to empty everything in you that is not of Him, and be willing to lay it down and not pick it back up! Don't just read your Bible, study your Bible ask Him to help you understand His Word! Be obedient to His voice even when you don't want to! Everything you need to know is in His Word. That is why it is so important to be persistent and intimate with your studies of the Bible.

Religion taught me how to go through the motions. Jesus taught me how to walk with Him. One left me empty; the other changed everything.

To God alone be the glory.