Genesis, The Family, and Tony’s Testimony 071022

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 Last Wednesday morning I woke up and realized that I needed to say more about marriage and the family. I realized that I have failed to provide a personal connection to what I have preached on God’s word concerning marriage and family. Later that morning, I was talking to Peter about some things, and he said, “I think we need to ask, How deep does our Christianity go?” The context for this question was that we were talking about how often we know what God’s word says, yet we fail to put it into practice. Why is this? What is wrong with us? Why do we fail? Why do our marriages fail? Why do our families fall apart? Why is there so much dysfunction and pain, even in “Christian” families?

After a lot of thought and prayer, I connected our level of belief to our level of obedience to God’s word. How far does your Christianity go? How far will you let it go? How deep is your belief? Has your Christianity penetrated and permeated every aspect of your life? Or is it skin deep? Do you keep Jesus at arm’s length, or do you rely on Him only when you feel you have to?

I want to encourage you today to let go. Abandon who you believe yourself to be apart from Jesus. Step out and away from your flesh. Allow the Holy Spirit to change you. Romans 6:1-11 Says,

**“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of *His* resurrection, 6knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him,* that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. 11Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

As a believer in Christ, I am dead. And I am alive. I am dead to a Christ-less past, and alive to a future with Christ. This is as real as the fact that you are sitting in that chair.

Now, in regard to family, let me tell you a story. We all have one. We all have a past. Here is a little bit about my past. Genesis 2:24 says, **“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be[**[**k**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+2&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-55k)**] joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”**

We have talked about this. This is God’s perfect directive and will for us? Is it reality under the curse? Not really.

My mother was born to an alcoholic father and mother. My granddad, Ora Borton told the family when my mom was about four years old that he was going out to buy some smokes and never came back. He drove to Los Angeles and married another woman, and fathered another daughter with her. My mother and her older brother, my Uncle Gene, were left to pretty much fend for themselves during the school year from that point on. My grandmother was a prostitute and made extra money writing pornographic articles for a magazine. When my mom was four, she and my uncle were sent to work on a farm which was owned by a couple my grandmother knew. The man, George, sexually abused both my mother and uncle all summer long, and every subsequent summer afterward until my uncle was old enough to refuse going (four years later). After that, my mom was the sole victim of George until my grandmother died when mom was twelve. My grandmother’s death from gangrene set my mom free. Mom became independent at age twelve, and sort of ran the streets. She met a girl named Marge, who was the same age, and they moved in to an apartment together when they were thirteen.

When mom was sixteen, she got pregnant with me. The guy was ten years older. They met at a famous honky tonk bar in Pueblo, Colorado called the Silver Saddle. They dated sporadically, but when Mom told they guy (Marvin) that she was pregnant, he denied that it could be him and he disassociated with her. Sixteen and pregnant, mom moved out to California where my grandpa lived with his other wife and daughter.

I was born in June of 1965. Mom had turned seventeen. She was drinking and doing a lot of drugs at the time, but she had another child when I was one year old, and she gave that child up for adoption. I have never seen her. The father of that child offered to marry my mom and adopt me, but mom refused. She drove him away.

We moved back to Pueblo, Colorado when I was three years old, and mom married a guy named Glenn when I was four. We were with him for nearly a year. He was a heavy drinker, and one night when he was drunk, he beat mom up and put a shot gun in my mouth. He said he was going to blow my head off, (I remember this clearly) and mom attacked him. I escaped and hid. We moved out the next day. For the next few years, we moved around as mom went from job to job. I ended up attending 13 schools in my twelve years of schooling. During these years, many men came and went. I often saw things no child, or anyone for that matter, should ever see his mother doing. When I was eight, Mom married Jerry. Jerry and his father owned a truck stop with a café and a mechanic shop. Jerry was also a heavy drinker, and very abusive to mom and I. He had three sons, all within a couple years of age to me. He had custody of them every other weekend. That, plus the fact that for the first time in my life, we had a little money, made this one of the better years of my childhood. We were only with Jerry for one year, but it was eventful. His best friend, a really nice guy named Red, was killed working in the auto shop (I snuck out of bed and followed him when he got the call and ended up seeing Red’s body on the shop floor). A few months earlier, Jerry had found his brother dead by suicide in a car. This happened at the house next door to us.

I remember the night my mom told Jerry she was going to divorce him. He cried and begged her not to, crawling on the floor to her and hugging her legs. I felt disgust for him. I was glad, though. I was tired of the screaming fights, the dishes flying and crashing against the walls, and of mom and me both serving as punching bags for him.

After Jerry, we bounced around from place to place and from boyfriend to boyfriend. When I was eleven, Mom was dramatically converted to Christianity. She had a “Come to Jesus,” so to speak, and she immediately stopped drinking and messing around with men. Her emotional problems remained, though. She was extremely hard to live with and hounded me constantly to accept Jesus and to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Her brand of Christianity was extremely experiential and emotional. I braced against it.

I gave in to the insistent tug of the Holy Spirit and put my trust in Jesus when I was eleven. Life and mom were both still a mess, but I knew I was saved somehow. Mom remained single, and we moved around a lot. I went to three different schools my 8th grade year, and I went to three different high schools. My mom married another man, Terry, when I was nineteen. Ten years later, she divorced him. She never remarried.

I never really had a family. It was pretty much just me and my mom. My grandpa came back into the picture (with yet another wife) when I was 5. He had quit drinking, and although foul mouthed and rough, gave me a sense of stability. Everybody else in mom’s family was either a hopeless drunk or kept their distance. The family had been ripped apart by alcohol.

I would have grown up with no concept of a normal family if had not been for “Aunt Marge and Uncle Andy.” Marge, mom’s friend from adolescence, married a cowboy from eastern Colorado when she was nineteen. She moved with him onto the family ranch. When my mom moved back to Colorado, she started sending me to the ranch with Aunt Marge and Uncle Andy every chance she could. She would stay in Pueblo and party while I was on the ranch. I was there many weekends, every summer, and most holidays. Uncle Andy was put in my life by God. I am convinced of this. It was there on the ranch and by my uncle Andy that I learned what a “normal” family should look like.

I remember thinking when I was a kid that my life was going to be different. I would not be like my father or the men that drifted in and out of mom’s crazy life. I remember resolving to be a good dad and husband after I watched Jerry beg my mom to stay and then threaten to kill us if she left. I believe God used my “family” experiences when I was young to help break the cycle of alcohol, sexual and physical abuse, and abandonment that characterized every man I ever knew except for my good uncle Andy and later on, grandpa.

I have often wondered how in the world my family turned out okay. I’ll tell you right now, it is only by the incredible grace of God. There is more to my testimony, much more, but for now it is enough for you to know that I have no reason to feel proud. God has done a miracle in my life. Period.

God makes all things new. 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us that, **“Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”**

I am not what I once was. I am not the family I came from. I am a new creation. Old things are gone. All things are new.

How true is this in your life? Are you willing to let yourself go? Are you willing to turn your back on the sins of the past? How deep does your Christianity go? Are you willing to let Jesus take you all the way? Are you willing to die to your past? If you are married, is your Christianity alive and evident in your marriage?

Application:

1. Let go of your past (Ephesians 2:1-3)

2. Discard your old identity (Ephesians 4:22-24)

3. Be who God says you are (Romans 6:11)