

From the Poolroom to the Pulpit:

The Story of Johnny Hunt

as told by Johnny Hunt

transcribed for publication by Jerry Davison

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About Johnny Hunt

Pastor Johnny M. Hunt became the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Woodstock on December 1, 1986. During his first month, a total of 55 people joined the church by baptism and letter. Since that time, First Baptist has witnessed phenomenal growth both numerically and physically. With a total membership of over 5000, the church hosts an average of 3000 worshippers in two Sunday morning services and has seen over 2700 people saved and baptized into the fellowship under Pastor Hunt's godly leadership. But, as he is quick to point out, "This great work God has done at First Baptist church is a miracle, and all the honor, praise and glory goes to our Heavenly Father, for without Him none of it would be possible!"

Introduction

Occasionally, someone will stop me and ask, "Johnny, do you think a person can be saved and not be changed?" Well, I have an opinion but my opinion really doesn't matter. But when God has an opinion on something, it really does matter. The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away and, behold, all things are become new."

Jesus Christ is in the life changing business. He changed Paul of Tarsus. He changed Peter, the fisherman. He changed Matthew, the tax collector. He even changed Legion, a man possessed of demons! I'd like to take a moment now and share with you my own personal experience and confrontation with a living God and how Jesus Christ changed my life.

The Early Years

I was raised in Wilmington, North Carolina. My father was a heavy equipment operator and my mom, at that time, was a housewife and mother of six. I have three brothers and two sisters. I was what we used to call the "knee baby." Now, evidently, they don't understand this terminology in Georgia. Somebody in my congregation said, "The what baby?" Where I come from, if you're the next to the youngest, you're the "knee baby." I can remember some happy times with my family in those early days. I have especially fond memories of our Christmas times together.

My dad was a big man that worked hard all week. But when he came home on the weekends, he felt like he owed it to himself, since he worked hard all week, to drink hard all weekend. I can still remember very vividly, when we were living in a little government project called Nesby Courts, my father came into my bedroom early one morning and, as he had done with the rest of my brothers and sisters, he reached over, gave me a little kiss on the cheek and told me "good-bye." He had decided to divorce my mother and move to Kentucky.

Hard Times at Home

As a result of my father leaving her with six children, my mom was forced to go to work. She was a wonderful provider. She would work all day in a factory and then at a second job in a restaurant at night. To this day, one of the main reasons I attempt to be so kind to people who work in restaurants is because I

see my mother in every one of those dear ladies who work there. As a matter of fact, nothing aggravates me more than to go out to eat with somebody who is rude to the person that's waiting on us. Whether they give me good service or not, I'm so reminded of a mother that I loved with all my heart that I always leave a gracious tip. My mom always worked hard and did her best to raise us. I can honestly say that I never went hungry and was deprived of very little.

But I can remember how I used to resent my dad for leaving us all alone there in that tiny project with six children and mom having to work two jobs. I used to talk a lot about how much I resented him until one night a sweet lady, who is in my congregation today, came up to me and said, "You know, Johnny, when you have an opportunity I'd like to sit down with you and tell you about an alcoholic father that didn't leave. In a way, you ought to be thanking God that yours did." I had never thought about it from that perspective. So, in a way, I guess I am kind of grateful, understanding now how he abused my mom and lost his temper with his children on a number of occasions.

A Rebellious Child

As a young boy, I was an excellent student, known by all my teachers. I loved school and did the best work I could. However, as I grew into my teenage years, I became rebellious and disobedient.

In the project where we lived, there used to be parties in the recreation building on Friday and Saturday evenings. My older brother, Buddy, would go up to the dance with his friends just to hang out and get drunk. I thought, Boy, they are so cool! I remember slipping up into the bushes behind that building where I knew they had hidden their whiskey. And at the impressionable age of eleven, I experienced what it meant to be drunk.

I can still remember my brother Norman, who is now a Baptist preacher also, coming into my bedroom with air freshener and spraying me. I looked up at him and said, "Norman, what in the world are you doing?" He said, "Johnny, you came in last night and puked all over yourself. I was spraying you because the odor is all through the house!"

They say that if you ever drink to the point where you don't even remember opening the bottle, you're probably an alcoholic. And as an eleven year old boy, on a regular basis, I came home on the weekends not remembering where I'd been.

Sunset Park Poolroom

When I was about fourteen years old, I wanted more than anything in the whole world to be able to attend a little place called Sunset Park Poolroom. All my buddies who were older than me went there. Donald Pope, another Baptist minister and a good friend of mine to this day, used to hang out up there. Man, I thought he was cool! I wanted to go up there and hang out with him and all the other guys.

So a friend of mine did me a great favor. He found a driver's license that said the person was sixteen years old, had green eyes and brown hair, and was about my height and weight. This was back in the days before they put your picture on it. He gave me those fake ID's and I used those to get into the poolroom. So, at fourteen years old, I became a regular at Sunset Park Poolroom.

I can remember my mom giving me lunch money and sending me off to school. I'd walk into the poolroom and ask the owner, Mr. Bullard, "How long can I play for ninety cents?" If nobody was there he'd say, "Just go on back in the corner and find a table. If it starts getting crowded, I'll take you off." So for five years of my life, I played pool, sometimes for as long as eight hours a day.

I learned to play position pool, straight pool and in tournaments. I was gambling for large sums of money when I was just a teenager. When I recently became the chaplain for the local high school football team, some of the football players came up to me and asked, "Reverend Hunt, what did you play in high school?" And I said, "Nine ball." Really, I had no athletic ability whatsoever. You didn't learn a whole lot of that in the pool hall, except for maybe how to swing a pool stick. But that's where I spent most of my high school days.

As a student of the pool hall, I habitually drank and cursed and gambled. When I was in the ninth grade, I skipped more days of school than I attended. As a result, the truant officer found me and I was put on

probation. To my shame, I was suspended from school more times than I care to remember. But even as a young fifteen or sixteen year old boy, I understood that there was no purpose and no direction in my life.

High School Drop-out

I remember when I turned sixteen, the first thing I did was get my driver's license. The second thing I did was quit school. The reason I quit school was because they told me that I had to give an oral book report. Now, believe it or not, back in those days I was extremely shy. I couldn't sleep at night, I couldn't eat, thinking about standing before a crowd of people and speaking. I was so terrified of the idea that I was willing to quit school before I'd stand before a group and give a report. So I quit school and, let me tell you, it was nothing but downhill from there.

One result of being a high school drop-out was an abundance of free time. So J.C. Bullard hired me and I became the manager of Sunset Park Poolroom, spending most of my days and evenings there.

The Accident

As a result of hanging around there, I had very little money. My sister, Mary, had a good job and a good car. She was gracious enough to let me drive her car on the weekend or whenever I had a date.

One night, I went with some buddies of mine to the drive-in. We had been out a while and were heavily under the influence. We got into a little scuffle there and we really didn't like the way things turned out. So I went home, intending to get my gun and go back to shoot the guy who I felt had done me wrong. I went home with a friend of mine and got a shotgun, put it in the back of the car, and headed back to the drive-in with every intention of killing a man.

On my way back over there, I ran off the right side of the road. I jerked the wheel back and the car went into a spin. We spun several times across the median. And when the car finally stopped, it was upside down, facing the traffic. I was hanging out of the car, having been dragged down the road. I can honestly say that night, I was hoping that I would die in that accident.

One of the main reasons I wanted to die was that I was scared to death to face my sister. She told me before I left, "You better not drink. And if you do, and you wreck my car, I'll kill you!" One of the most frightening moments ever in my life was having to tell my sister that night, as she came to the hospital and later, as they put me in jail for the night, that I had totaled her car.

But I continued to run that poolroom from the age of sixteen until about nineteen. During that time, I got another job working at a place called Jacobi Hardware.

Johnny and Janet

It was around that time, when I turned the late, great seventeen years of age, I met a young girl at a pizza parlor by the name of Janet. She and I immediately fell in love. We started seeing each other every single night. After a long time of dating (I think it was six months!), I asked her to be my wife. And on November 21, 1970, Janet became my bride.

It was not long after that our marriage was in serious trouble. I was spending most of my time at the saloon on weekends, managing the poolroom every extra hour I had during the week, and hanging around Jacobi Hardware besides. That's when Janet began to talk to me about how we needed to start going to church.

A Good Ol' Presbyterian Boy

I know from experience where you men are coming from, whose wives are after you to get up on Sunday morning and come to church. Janet had been raised in a Presbyterian church under the influence of her grandmother, Mrs. Selma Allen, one of the godliest ladies I've ever known in all of my life. She used to call me and plead with me to go. I thought so much of her wanting me to attend. So about every two months or so, Janet would encourage me to go to church.

She used to ask me on Saturday night, "Can we go to church tomorrow?" And my attitude would be, "Well, let's wait and see in the morning." And in the morning I'd act like I was so tired I couldn't get out of bed. She would say, "Let's go to church, honey." And I would say, "Boy, I don't know what's wrong with me, I just feel nauseaus! Let's go some other time." I'd do everything I could to keep from going to church.

Then a fellow began to come to the store where I was working. His name was N.W. Pritchett. He was a very simple man who lived out on Shipyard Boulevard, right down the road from Long Leaf Baptist Church in Wilmington. N.W. Pritchett would come into the store and, regardless of what our conversation would be, he would never leave without simply saying, "You know, Johnny, I wish you would come to church with me sometime. I'm a member of Long Leaf Baptist Church." And I would always tell him, "Well, thank you for inviting me but I'm a faithful attendant down at the Presbyterian church." That meant I went on Easter and at Christmas. "I appreciate you asking me, but me and my family, we're really locked in down there!"

Let me just stop here and say this: You may be reading this right now, and the bottom line for you is that you are lost and on your way to hell. You've been hiding behind the disguise of some church membership somewhere but you're just as lost as a goose, and you know that you'd go to hell if you died this instant.

That was my attitude back there at the hardware store. I would say, "Listen, I'm a good old Presbyterian boy and I appreciate you asking. But I'm going to keep going with my wife over here at this church." But Mr. Pritchett would always come back and every time he did, he'd invite me to church.

A Changed Life

One time he asked me, "Johnny, do you know an old boy that hangs around the poolroom by the name of Drew Todd?"

"Yeah, I know Drew"

"Did you hear what happened to him last week?"

"No, I haven't seen him," I said. "He used to hang around the poolroom all the time."

"Well," he said, "Drew got saved."

Now, little did I know what it meant to "get saved." I used to think that if you were religious, you were born that way. I thought that people just decided to be religious and I had chosen to not be religious. I had made my mind up that I wouldn't go to church and just I figured Drew had decided that he would!

But let me tell you what I remembered about Drew. I remembered when this self-proclaimed prophetess said many years ago, in the early seventies, that the world was going to come to an end one Saturday night. I can remember Drew standing out in front of the poolroom, shaking his fist at the sky and saying, "If there's a God in Heaven, strike me dead!" And now I'm hearing that Drew is going over to the Baptist church and that God has changed his life!

Long Leaf Baptist Church

Week after week, N.W. would come in and before he would leave he would always say, "Well, you know what I'm going to ask you, don't you?" I'd say, "Yes, it sounds like a recording on Dial-A-Devotion." But in November of 1972, I finally told my wife, "If you're going to keep hounding me about church, let's just get up and go to the Baptist church that's right down the street from our house." We drove less than two blocks to Long Leaf Baptist Church. When I went in that morning I asked one of the men, "Is N.W. Pritchett here?" And on the very day that I went, he was not there! He came back in the store the next week and said, "I want you to come to church with me." I said, "I went the other day and you weren't there!"

Marian Bennett, the woman who later became my church secretary in Wilmington, once told me, "Johnny, I remember the first day you and Janet came to church. I punched my husband Mitchell and I said, 'Mitchell, would you look back there? There's a fine looking Christian couple!' " Isn't it amazing how we can disguise ourselves to look like we're on our way to heaven?

A fellow asked me recently, "Preacher, where do you believe Judas is right now?" I said, "The Bible teaches that Judas is in hell." And he said, "Well, do you think that he got saved and then got lost?" I said,

“No, not at all! Judas was never saved. Jesus referred to him as ‘the devil.’ “ He was shocked! He said, “You mean to say you could hang around with the disciples and walk in intimacy with Jesus Christ and not be saved?” That’s exactly what I’m saying! You can preach, you can give testimony, you can hold street meetings and still not be saved! So you see, even though I looked like a fine Christian man, wearing my blue pinstripe suit to church that morning, I was lost without God.

Deep Conviction

Then, in December of 1972, after attending for several weeks, God began to bring me under deep conviction. I remember during that period of time, my friend Donald Pope was in the navy and he and his wife Debbie were stationed up in Norfolk, Virginia. He invited us to come up and visit with them one weekend. So we went and while Donald and I were sitting there drinking Bloody Marys, I was telling him the difference that God was making in my life!

“Donald,” I said, “I just want you to know that I’ve been attending a Baptist church.” He said, “You know, I’ve been thinking about religion lately, too.”

“Man, it’s wonderful,” I said. “It’s a great feeling to go to church!” Do you know that a lot of people are going to go to hell with “good feelings” because they have never been saved? I was just as lost at Long Leaf Baptist Church as I had always been hanging around the poolroom.

But then something began to happen in my life, maybe you can identify with this. I would go to church and everything would be fine as long as the sermon was being preached or somebody was singing. But then the preacher would say, “We’re going to stand together in a moment and sing an invitation hymn.” And I don’t know what would happen to me, but I would begin to weep. Someone told me, and now I understand after being a Christian, that it was conviction.

The Word of God says in John 16:18 that the Holy Spirit, the parakletos, the Comforter, when He comes, will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment to come. That means that the Holy Spirit will expose your need for Jesus Christ. I was sitting in that worship service and God was exposing my need.

Now, let me just catch you up on what was happening in my life up to that point. I used to ride by the church in my red ‘67 GTO and I’d look over there and say to my wife, “Do you see those guys out in front of the church? Half of them hang out at the poolroom and gamble with me. And look at them! You see the cigarettes in their hand?”

But do you know what? When the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin, you don’t look at other people’s faults anymore, you look at your own. You no longer measure yourself by somebody at the church, you measure yourself by Jesus Christ, the sinless, perfect, holy Son of God. And so that day, the Holy Spirit began to convict me of my sin.

I would sit there and cry during the invitation. I call God as my witness, I never carried a handkerchief in my back pocket as long as I’d lived until I started attending a Baptist church! And the reason I started carrying one is because, after the invitation, they would pray, and I thought I was such a big shot by hanging around the poolroom, I didn’t want anybody to see my tears. So I’d pull that old handkerchief out while all the heads were bowed and everybody was praying, and I’d wipe my tears so nobody would know that I had been crying. I was ashamed of the fact that I couldn’t handle my emotions when God began to move on my heart.

When God Speaks, You Listen!

I continued to go to church there on into January. And I’ll never forget, on a Sunday morning, January 7, 1973, my wife and I got up and went to church. It was a very cold morning, as I recall. And while we were sitting there, the same thing happened.

I wish that I could tell you that the preacher preached this great sermon (he probably did) and tell you what the title of it was and the text that he used. But I don’t remember anything about the sermon. I was only thinking, “Oh, God! Here comes the invitation!” And when they gave it, the tears began to flood.

They stood that morning and sang:

“Just as I am without one plea,

but that Thou bidst me come to Thee...

O Lamb of God, I come!"

And as they were singing that song, I fell under conviction and was weeping. My wife noticed that I was crying and asked if I was alright. "Yes," I said. "Well, what's wrong with you?" she asked. And I said, "Shut up!" You see, I didn't know what was happening in my life and it embarrassed me for her to know that I was crying.

Debbie Joyner, a friend of mine from high school, and her husband, Alfred, were sitting on the other side of me. They were wonderful church people and I knew them well. But I didn't know that they were Christians. I just knew they were wonderful church people! Debbie asked me, "Johnny, would you like to go forward and be saved this morning?" Nobody had ever personally asked me this question and, I'll be honest with you, everything in my heart wanted to say "yes" but my pride said, "Not today."

After the service that day, my wife and I got into our car. Normally, we'd go home just for a moment, and then we'd make our way up the road about 45 miles north to a little place called Holly Ridge Drag Strip where I raced my GTO on Sunday afternoons. But that day I said, "You know, I don't think I want to go to the drag strip today. Why don't we hang around the house and go back to church tonight?" Now I had never been to church on Sunday night before. I had never been to church in an evening service in my entire life. I had never even attended a revival service. She said, "You want to go back to church?" I said, "Yeah, you know the preacher was talking about me this morning." She thought I meant that I had been offended and wouldn't go back anymore. So she said, "Oh, Johnny, he wasn't talking about you!" But I disagreed.

"During the invitation," I told her, "the preacher said, 'There's a young man here and God's dealing with him. We need to pray that God would save him. Let's just join together and pray that God will bring him back and save him tonight.' Janet, he was talking about me."

"Oh no," she said, "he wasn't talking about you!" But isn't it amazing when God speaks to you, it doesn't matter what anybody else says, you know that He's talking to you! And God was speaking to my heart that night.

"Tell Him I Want to be Saved!"

I said, "Janet, did you know that somebody came up to me one day and offered me some speed? He said, 'This will keep you awake and you can drink yourself sober!' And I said, 'Man, give me one!' Somebody else said, 'Drink this and it will make you act like these guys!' And I said, 'Boy, give me one!' It's amazing what I have allowed to come into my life by faith, not knowing for sure until I took it in. Janet, if Jesus Christ can change my life, and boy, I sure feel that I need it, then I'd be willing to give my heart and life to Him."

And it was then that my wife said, "Well, you know, honey, there's something that I've never shared with you. Just before I started dating you, I was going to a little revival. God moved on my heart and I fell under deep conviction. I want you to know that I know that I am saved."

"You are?" I said. "Well then, since you're saved, I want you to do me a favor. I want you to go to church tonight and, when the invitation is given, I want you to go down and tell that preacher that I want to be saved!"

"No!"

"Come on! You know how timid and shy I am! I am not going to walk that aisle in front of all those people. I just can't do it, I'm too scared! Just go on down and tell him."

"No, you've got to go tell him."

"No, I can't go tell him!"

"Well, if you want to get saved bad enough, you'll go and tell him!" I sat around there all afternoon, nervous and thinking, "Oh, God! What am I going to do?"

Finally, it was time for the church service and I asked Janet, "Listen, why don't we go down together and you tell him I want to get saved?" But she said, "No, I'm not going to go down with you at all! If you want to get saved, you ought to go on down right by yourself." You should understand that this was before we knew anything about soul-winning or bringing people to Jesus Christ.

One Snowy Night in January

I'll never forget as long as I live, it snowed that afternoon. And let's be honest, it only takes about 19 drops of rain to keep 20 Baptists out of church! It had not snowed in January in Wilmington until two years before, but it snowed again that Sunday night. I guess God was saving another young preacher!

I had every reason in the world not to go to church. But in my heart of hearts, I really wanted to give my life to Jesus Christ. I wanted to invite Him into my heart and give Him an opportunity to change my life if, indeed, He was the very God who could do it.

Normally, we'd walk in the church and sit near the back. But I knew I was going to be going forward that night and I didn't want to walk a long way! So we came down to about the third pew. A friend of mine, Roy Joyner, was sitting there. Roy said, "Come on over!" And I said, "No, if you don't mind, I want you to move on in!" I didn't want to have to climb over anybody. I wanted to make it as easy as I possibly could!

I sat there during that whole service, my mind consumed with the fact that, when the invitation was given, I would be going forward to trust my life to Jesus Christ. Now I never was one much for praying, but that afternoon I prayed. "Dear Lord," I said, "I'm going to come down tonight to trust You, and I'd appreciate it if You'd help me not to cry." So that night, when the invitation was given, I didn't cry. I just went down and I told the preacher, "I want to give my heart and life to Jesus Christ." I'll never forget that moment, it's indelibly written in my heart and mind.

Gloriously Saved!

When I went down and invited Jesus into my heart that night, that preacher worked a little different with people than we do now. He said, "Now, son, do you believe Jesus died on the cross?"

"Yes, Mr. Gibson, I believe Jesus died."

"Do you believe He died on the cross for your sins?"

"Yessir, I do."

"Now, are you asking Jesus to come into your life today? Is that what you want to do?"

"Yessir, I want Jesus Christ to come into my heart."

"Do you believe God raised Him from the dead?"

"Yessir."

"Since you said you want Him into your heart, and you're coming to ask Him into your heart, do you believe He is in your heart?"

"Yessir, I do!"

And that night, January 7, 1973, Jesus changed my life!

These days someone will question whether or not you prayed the prayer just right, if you came down the aisle just right, or how somebody counselled you. But my Bible tells me that God knows the heart. And God looked at the heart of Johnny Hunt when he came down that night and He knew that I was basically illiterate, being a high school drop-out. I knew very little about praying. I knew nothing about God or His Word. I only knew I was lost and wanted to be saved. And that night, Jesus Christ came into my life and I was gloriously saved!

They did things a little different then we do now. The preacher stood me down front at the close of the service and said, "We're going to ask these who have gotten saved to stand here so the church can come by and give them the right hand of fellowship and encourage them in their decision."

I remember people coming, some of them I knew by name. Libb Lyles came by. I remember seeing her in the choir and thinking, "She looks at me the whole time I'm here." I felt so nervous, like she was just staring at me when I was crying. She came by and she said, "Johnny, I've been praying for you for weeks!" Another little lady came by the name of Mrs. Carol. She also said, "I've been praying for you for weeks!"

A New Creation

By the time service was over, the grounds had been totally covered with snow. All the windshields were hidden beneath it. I remembered I had a can of defogger in my car. So I spent the next hour outside scraping windshields for all the ladies in the church. I tell you, God changed me! No longer was I self-

centered; worried about getting home, worried about myself. I wanted to do something to help somebody else. I just felt changed all over.

And I didn't know you weren't supposed to tell everybody! I went to work the next day and told Abraham Solomon, the Jewish man that I worked for, "Mr. Solomon! Mr. Solomon! Guess what happened? Last night, Jesus saved me!"

Now, I call the Lord Jesus as my witness, I didn't know what a Jew was. I thought a Jew was a person who had been nicknamed that for trying to "jew" you! I'd never read the Old Testament, or any other part of the Bible, for that matter. I didn't know anything about Abraham and Moses and Jacob.

Just then the owner, Nathan Jacobi, came in. I said, "Nathan! Nathan! Guess what? Jesus changed my life!"

Well, after about a week, I was so excited I was telling everybody I met how Jesus changed my life. I'd be over shaking a gallon of paint at the hardware store and say to the customer, "Hey, guess what happened to me Sunday night? I got saved!" And I felt like I wasn't telling enough people! So I went out and bought some blue jeans and some little stickers that said, "Jesus died for me" and "Jesus loves me" and I put them all over my pants. Then I went down there working for Jews, bragging on Jesus, telling them how the Son of God changed my life!

"Home" Missions

Believe it or not, I never liked church until I got saved. My wife used to beg me to go to church, and now she couldn't beg me to stay home! Jesus changed my "want to" toward church. So I went home and told my whole family how Jesus changed my life.

I told my mother, "Momma! Momma! Guess what? Jesus changed my life!" She said, "Now, son, just tell me what happened?" I said, "You know how I used to drink liquor all the time and go out and get drunk and get in fights? Momma, I don't even want to drink anymore! I don't want to go to the poolroom anymore. I don't want to gamble. Momma, all I want to do is live for Jesus!"

My brother Norman said, "Well now, don't come talking that stuff to me! When I went to church, I used to talk to you about it and you wouldn't go." I said, "Norman, I'm not talking about going to church, I'm talking about being saved! I'm changed, Norman, really changed!"

I have another brother, Freddy, who is 6'4" and used to be a boxer. He came home one night and said, "You know what they're saying about you at the poolroom? They're saying that Johnny Hunt got religion and now he thinks he's better than everybody else." I said, "Oh, Freddy, that's just not true!"

"Well, Johnny, you talk about how much you love Jesus and love everybody..."

"I do! I love Rex and Randy and Donald... I love all those guys!"

"Well, it seems to me if you loved all of them so much you'd go up to the poolroom and tell them."

"But, Freddy, you don't understand. Jesus saved me from that lifestyle!"

Did you know that, if you check your Bible you'll find that Jesus spent more time around places like the pool hall than He did at the church? I didn't, not at that time. And so I said, "I'm not going!" And Freddy left.

Back in the Hood

Then God did something He'd done before I got saved. He put me under conviction. I told my wife, "Janet, I'm going to go out and talk to all my friends about Jesus tonight."

"Where are you going?" she asked. I said, "I'll tell you when I get home!"

My first stop was Buzz Davenport's barber shop. Buzz had a filthy mouth. If you know anything about a life living around a poolroom and the vocabulary you pick up, you can imagine that I had a filthy mouth, too! It kept me in trouble. Charles Spurgeon used to say, "When Jesus Christ came into my life, I lost eighty percent of my vocabulary!" That was me, too. I mean, Jesus literally changed my tongue. Now whenever anybody asks me, "Do you ever speak in tongues?" I tell them I've been speaking in

tongues ever since I got saved! When I met Jesus, I didn't like cussing anymore so I went out and found a Christian barber and stopped going to Buzz.

So I went by to tell him. "Buzz," I said, "I just wanted to tell you something..."

"I already heard," he said. "You got religion."

"No, I didn't get religion, Buzz, I got Jesus! He changed my life!"

I left Buzz and went over to the Red Fox Saloon. Ray Brown was managing the poolroom there. I'll never forget, when I walked in, Ray was playing with a cap pistol.

I said, "Ray, I just want to tell you the reason I haven't been coming to the saloon on the weekend.

Jesus changed my life! And Ray, man, I don't drink anymore, I don't cuss anymore, I quit smoking... He's just changed my life! Man, I'm living for Jesus!" And as I was sharing my testimony with him, Ray placed that little cap pistol to his cheek and caught the tears that were falling from his eyes into the barrel of the gun. God had brought him under conviction as I shared with him.

Return to Sunset Park

But then I had to make the biggest step of all. I went down to Sunset Park Poolroom. This is the place Willie Mosconi used to play. Fairmont Kid was known as one of the greatest position pool players there. And I managed that poolroom for three or four years. I had been hanging around there since I was fourteen. And now I was a twenty year old man whose life Jesus Christ had changed.

I walked in and said, "J.C., I owe you an apology. I've not even been back here to officially quit my job but I guess you've heard."

"Yes, son. I'm proud of you," J.C. said. "I heard you got religion and joined the church."

"No, J.C., it's not just joining the church. You see, Jesus Christ changed my life!"

"Johnny," he said, "I'm fifty years old. You know my wife Eva, don't you?"

"Yeah, man, I know Eva."

"You know, we've been talking about God lately. I wonder if you can come by my house tomorrow night and tell me and Eva exactly what Jesus has done in your heart." Now, remember, I was a brand new Christian. I didn't know how to quote verses of Scripture or anything. But I said, "J.C., I'll be there tomorrow night at 6:00!"

Soul-Winner

I went home and called Alfred Joyner. He was a soul-winner that had been taking me witnessing.

"Alfred," I said, "I think J.C. wants to get saved! We need to go over there and get him saved tomorrow night at 6:00!" Alfred said, "I'll meet you at your house and we'll go at six."

About a quarter of six he called and said, "Guess what? I've got to work over time and I can't go." Well, I couldn't go by myself so I got on the phone and called J.C. "Listen," I said, "I just want to tell you that I can't come tonight. I've had something to happen and I'm just not going to be able to go up there and share with you. Maybe I'll come tomorrow night."

I called Alfred the next night and he said, "Man, I hate to tell you this but I've got to work over again." I thought, "What am I going to do, Lord?"

Well, when I got saved, they gave me a "Soul-Winner's New Testament." We need to start giving these out again. With a "Soul-Winner's" New Testament, you could open it to the front page and it would say, "If you want to tell somebody how to be saved, turn to page 283." And you would turn to that page and it would have, underlined in red, a particular passage of Scripture. Then, at the bottom, it would say, "Now ask them this question and turn over two pages."

So I went to J.C.'s house that night and opened it up, and it gave me Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Then it said, "Now turn to the right two pages." So I flipped it on over and said, "Now, J.C., all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Do you realize you're a sinner?" I was reading it from the bottom of the page. He said, "Yes, I do."

Then I said, "Now, look at this. The Bible says, 'The wages of sin is death...' Now this word 'death' here (I was a preacher even back then!) means spiritual separation from God. J.C., it means you'll go to hell if you don't ever get saved. Do you know you're going to go to hell if you don't get saved?"

"Yeah."

"Do you know that, Eva?" And she said, "I sure do."

Then I said, "Now, look at this." I turned over to Romans 5:18 and read, " 'But God commended His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' J.C., do you know that when Jesus died on the cross, He died for you?"

"That's exactly right."

"Now look at this good news. The Bible says that 'if thou shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shall be saved.' Now listen to this one, J.C., it's the greatest promise in the Bible! Romans 10:13, 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'" J.C., do you believe if you called on the name of the Lord Jesus, He'd hear you and forgive you?"

"I do."

"Would you like to get down on your knees, you and Eva, and ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart and save you?"

"That's what I want to do." So here is this young boy who had just gotten saved, down on his knees with J.C. and Eva, and that night the two of them asked Jesus Christ to come into their hearts.

The next morning, we went over to Sunset Park Poolroom and put a "for sale" sign on the front door. We wrote on it, "Going out of business." We advertised in the paper and sold every piece individually so we could close that old hell hole down. Remember now, this was one of the most popular poolrooms in North Carolina! We closed it down when J.C. Bullard got saved, and we baptized him at Long Leaf Baptist Church. He later became a deacon and an usher there. Someone asked me, "Well, what does he do for a living?" He bought a Tom's peanut truck and started selling peanuts.

The Talk of the Town

I used to spend every weekend sharing my testimony with anybody who would listen. They even heard about it down at the Presbyterian church. The preacher called me up one day and said, "Everybody in town is talking about you. They're saying that everywhere you go, you're preaching and telling people how you've been changed." It was true. People would come into the hardware store and say, "You sound like a preacher!" I sort of liked that!

So the Presbyterian church said, "Listen, we're having a big family night supper this Sunday night. There will be more people here than there is all month. Would you come down and tell the church what happened to you?"

I got a bunch of people together from the church that could sing and we went down there. We got around a piano and do you know what song we sang at the Presbyterian church? "I Wish We'd All Been Ready." It talked about how time had passed and people had gone to hell and we wish we'd all been ready. And I got up that night and told how Jesus changed my life.

Now, I was not a preacher back then and I didn't know how to give an invitation or anything, but here's what I said: "If you want what I got, come on down!" And they did! Both of my wife's cousins came down. Several men came down. They were weeping before God and wanting to get saved. We didn't know what to do with them! I was up there saying, "Come on down! Come on down!" So they were coming on down.

The elders of the church took them to a back room for counselling. They came up to me after the service and said, "Brother Johnny, they're back there in that back room wanting to get what you got. Would you go back there and tell them how to get it?" So I went back there and I said, "Ya'll want Jesus to come into your heart?" I opened my Bible to Romans 10:13, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord..." And that night they called upon the name of the Lord and they, too, invited Jesus Christ into their hearts.

Prayer for a Mother

I remember it was a great desire of mine to know if my mother was saved or not. When I began to talk to my mom about it, she told me, "Son, when you were a little boy, we lived in Detroit, Michigan. Your dad worked there for the car dealership. During that time I went to a Baptist church. And son, I know as well as I'm breathing right now that Jesus changed my life." I said, "Well, mom, I want you to come to church with me." I didn't know why, but my mom was a little hard-hearted. She'd come up pretty tough and she just wouldn't go to church.

But there was a lady named Lila Todd, and she used to say to her, "You know something? If I had a son that had been as radically changed as yours, I'd go sit with him at church. I'd be there to support him. He used to hang around the poolroom. He used to stay in trouble with the law. And now he's living for God! Bessie, if you'll go there, it would really make a difference in your son's life."

Then one evening, my mom called me and said, "I'll go to church with you this Sunday night." So that Sunday night she went. And I prayed for her.

Now, I was the type of guy who would get in there first and whisper to everybody, "My mom's here! Pray! My mom's here! Pray!" And everybody prayed.

That night the choir sang "O Why Not Tonight?"

Dear sinner, harden not your heart.

Be saved, O why not tonight?

And on that Sunday evening service, my momma came forward and got right with Jesus. And I want you to know, for the next few years, she really lived for God.

Full Circle

Little did I know, God was going to call me to preach. But He did and I went off to Gardner-Webb college. I spent three and a half years there and immediately God put me in a pastorate. I pastored the entire time at Lavonia Baptist Church in Gafney, South Carolina. From there I went to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. I pastored Falls Baptist Church the entire time I was there.

And then, after being at school for six and a half years and serving as a pastor almost as long, I got a call from Long Leaf Baptist Church, the church that I had gotten saved in. They said, "Johnny, we believe God wants you to be the pastor back in your home town."

The church was about to close its doors. They were running less than ninety in Sunday school. They had an auditorium they had just built to seat over 500. Now they couldn't pay their bills. They couldn't even pay the preacher's salary. And they asked me if I'd consider becoming their pastor!

I didn't even have to think about it. I immediately resigned my church and became the pastor of the very church that God had saved me in. And God used me in that town to be able to touch my family and my friends, and see them come to know Jesus Christ.

"Jesus is in the Life-Changing Business!"

What I'm trying to say in this brief testimony is that, from the poolroom to the pulpit, what really happened is Jesus Christ changed my life. It was a simple, childlike experience. I simply believed with all my heart that on the cross, two thousand years ago, Jesus really died. They took Him down off the cross, wrapped His body, and placed Him in a borrowed tomb. And for three days, the Lord Jesus Christ was literally dead and buried.

But on the third day, early in the morning, Jesus, the living Son of God, rose from the dead! He sent the Holy Spirit of God into this world to convict our hearts of our sin and our need for Him. And He sent the Word of God to show us the way to heaven when we die. So now it is my mission and my message that what Jesus did in me and for me, He will do for you! Every sermon I preach is integrated with the fact that Jesus is in the life-changing business!

A Simple Invitation

Maybe you are reading this right now and you have come to a place in your life where you feel that something is missing. Maybe your situation is similar to what mine was. Maybe it's not. But still you can't help but wonder, "Is he right? Can Jesus really change my life the way he changed Johnny Hunt's?"

If you would like Jesus to come into your heart, it's as easy as asking. It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done, God is ready and willing to save you and forgive your sin. Remember what Romans 10:13 says? "Whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!" That "whosoever" is you! Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, just stop right now and tell Him you want to be saved. Maybe you're not sure what to say. If that's your case, you can pray this prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus,

I admit that I'm a sinner. I know that I am lost and going to hell without You. I am asking You now, Jesus, to please come into my heart, forgive me of my sins and change me like You changed Johnny Hunt. Thank You for saving me, Jesus. Thank You that I know that I am saved and that You have a place for me in Heaven when I die. Now help me to live my life for You, Jesus. And help me to tell everyone I know what You have done for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you prayed this prayer and meant it with all your heart, you are saved! But that is only the beginning. There is a whole life ahead of learning more about Jesus ahead of you. You can start by finding a Bible-believing church where the Word of God is taught and other Christians will encourage you in your new faith. Read the Bible everyday. Take time daily to talk with God in prayer.

We would like to know about your decision so that we can rejoice with you and send you some more information on our church and how you can grow as a new Christian. Please fill out the postage paid card below and drop it in the mail as soon as possible. May the Lord bless you!

For more information on the First Baptist Church of Woodstock and the preaching ministry of Johnny Hunt, write to us at this address:

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