

I have taken a rather circuitous route on my personal spiritual journey. My father was a non-practicing Lutheran. I don't remember him going to church at all during my childhood although my mother says we attended the Lutheran church as a family when I was a baby. I was raised in the Baptist church, attending Sunday school and worship services with my mother regularly until about age sixteen, then less often over time. As a child, I enjoyed going to Sunday school and vacation bible school, singing songs, learning bible stories and memorizing bible verses. I was baptized at the age of fourteen. I helped teach vacation bible school three summers and volunteered in the church nursery as needed.

As an adolescent, I became aware of inconsistencies between what I heard in church and behaviors that I witnessed among members of the congregation. I heard gossip and saw people being judgmental and treating others in a very unkind manner. At that time I attended church mainly to gain my mother's acceptance. I eventually left the Baptist church, telling myself that "they" were a bunch of hypocrites. Suffering from low self esteem and lacking strong spiritual guidance and support, I made some very poor choices and engaged in rebellious behaviors which led me further away from God. I didn't feel worthy of God's care and felt that my prayers were insignificant.

Through my late teen years and early twenties, I rarely attended church or read scripture. I told myself (and others) that I was "a spiritual person, not religious", that I didn't have to be in church in order to be close to God. The truth was that I didn't feel good about myself and shied away from revealing myself in an honest relationship with God and other believers for fear that I would prove lacking. I believed that Christ had died for my sins and counted him as my personal savior. Never completely without a moral conscience, I tried to be a "good person" and to treat others well. It never occurred to me that I was failing to meet my responsibilities in my

relationship with God. I prayed mostly when I was in trouble, calling on Him to help me out of whatever difficulty I had gotten myself into and reserving thanks for those times when things went well for me.

In my mid-twenties, I began to think I should get back to church. I sent my children to Sunday school with my mother but I couldn't get excited about returning to the church of my childhood. I just didn't agree with a lot of the doctrine and felt like it would be somehow dishonest to commit to that particular institution. I thought about visiting other churches (but took no action) and made a few attempts at bible "study" which consisted of reading scripture as if it were a chronological account of historical events. Needless to say, I gained little understanding, became frustrated and gave up. Through a period of about seven years, I experienced growth in many areas. I completed my associate degree, began my nursing career, and bought my first home, but my spiritual growth was at a standstill.

In 1997, my second marriage was failing. My husband was chemically addicted and my family was in chaos. I was in great emotional pain and was desperate for relief. I read self-help books, participated in individual and marital counseling, and prayed for my circumstances to change. I considered joining the Mormon Church (my husband's church), attended services a few times, and had some missionaries visit weekly for a couple of months. The teachings of the Latter Day Saints were very different from anything I had ever known and frankly seemed a bit "far out" to me. Finally, on the brink of despair, I was led to Al-Anon, a twelve step spiritual recovery program for families of alcoholics. In Al-Anon I learned that what was needed was not a change in circumstances but a change in me. Within those rooms, I discovered that I wasn't alone. I found unconditional love, understanding, and acceptance.

Al-Anon served as my “church” for several years. There I was able to develop a trusting personal relationship with God. I came to know and like myself for the first time in many years. As I grasped the principles of humility, willingness, obedience, and gratitude and began to apply them to my life, I was blessed with a level of serenity that I had never known before. The character of my prayers changed as I grew spiritually. I began to pray for guidance rather than for a specific outcome that I desired. I prayed daily to be a blessing to someone else. I began to pray for others’ health and happiness rather than for them to change to suit my needs. I continue to pray for these things today. I recognized and accepted that I need God in all things; that, in and of myself, I can do nothing. I began to live in gratitude and thank God for all good things in my life. In so doing, I found that I have much to be grateful for. I believe that God carried me through the difficult times in my life, waiting patiently for me to return to Him. I believe AA, Al-Anon, and other twelve step programs are inspired by God and I am eternally grateful to have rediscovered Him there.

Over the last few years, I have felt the need to return to more formal worship practices more strongly. I have inquired about churches of various denominations and listened to worship services on television and radio more frequently. I listened to Dr. Robin Meyers’ sermons on the radio and liked what I heard. Thus, I became interested in visiting Mayflower Congregational Church. I began attending services at Mayflower with two of my children and my grandson the first Sunday following the start of the Biblical Perspectives module. My twelve year old son hasn’t been interested in visiting Mayflower with us and continues to attend the Baptist church with my mother. I have learned that most things are all about priorities. It’s not so difficult to get the family ready and get to church on Sunday if that’s where you want to be.

I approached the Biblical Perspectives module with positive feelings of anticipation. I was not swayed by skeptical comments made by coworkers (“How is that going to make you a better nurse?” or “I know, I wasted a lot of time and money in my degree program on classes that had nothing to do with nursing.”). I answered by affirming that I felt the module would be very meaningful and was looking forward to it. I had no fears of attempted indoctrination or conversion to a particular faith. I have learned that I can choose what to accept or believe. In Al-Anon, we say “take what you like and leave the rest”. I feel pretty comfortable in my personal beliefs and with my classmates, so I wasn’t too nervous about sharing with others in the group. I hoped that some light would be shed on this great and mysterious work, the Holy Bible. I felt sure that I would enjoy this particular module and that has been true.

My actual experience in the Biblical Perspectives module has also been very positive. I have enjoyed class discussions and hearing about others’ personal experiences with religion and spirituality. The lectures, discussion and videos have awakened a desire to embark on a more in depth study of the scriptures. I even requested a concordance from my family for my birthday, which is pretty neat since I never knew what a concordance was before. I have found that formulating “questions of the week” is more challenging than I expected. I have tried to ask pertinent questions that are truly meaningful to me and possibly to others.

The texts *From Adam to Armageddon: a Survey of the Bible* (White & Wilson) and *Life Application Study Bible (new international version)* have been very helpful in my studies. The assigned readings and lecture have clarified much of what had me confused and frustrated in past attempts at Bible study. I have also found that I am better able to understand references to particular passages of scripture in church. The time line included in the study bible made me very aware of my own ignorance with regard to history and timing of events. It revealed that

many historical events occurred *centuries* earlier than I had assumed! Reading about the books of the bible grouped by author or theme made the content more meaningful for me. I previously had no idea that many of the writings that we recognize as scripture were multiple accounts of the same events or time periods by different authors from their individual perspectives. I never considered that they were written for a particular audience with specific purpose or intent.

While doing the assigned reviews of the books of the bible, particularly the books of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, I was amazed at the number of times and ways that God sent His message to His chosen people. Through Moses, He gave His Laws to the people and made a Covenant with them. He warned His people many times to obey the Law and honor His Covenant or they would be punished, they just didn't "get it". Sadly, it seems that many of us still don't get it. Even when God sent Jesus, the promised messiah, people doubted him. In spite of repeated evidence of his divinity, people refused to believe he was the true messiah. I wonder if we would do any better today.

I realize now more than ever that I have a responsibility to witness to others through my actions and to do my part in my relationship with God. This module, in combination with my return to formal worship in church has helped me resolve some moral and spiritual issues that I have been struggling with. I feel that God has answered my prayers for guidance on these matters through my studies. Where I had been anxious and in doubt about the right choice or course of action, I have arrived at answers that I am comfortable with. I have turned away from options that I feel would not be pleasing to God, though they make reasonable sense on an intellectual level. I pray and ask myself what Christ would say to me if I presented my questions to him face to face.

I feel good about myself and my life today. I feel that I am growing spiritually and taking a path that is pleasing to God. I am pleased to finally accept the responsibility of leading my family on a spiritual path. I am thankful for the opportunity to participate in this module and for the insight and motivation I have received.