

A New Conversation about Faith

By: Michael Taylor

My earliest recollection about having faith and going to church begins back in the early seventies. I remember the look and sounds of the church I attended and the apparent power that the minister had over the congregation. In my young mind the minister was a direct representative of God so I came to the conclusion that the minister was definitely closer and more connected to God than any one. Although I was too young to really understand everything the minister was saying, intuitively I felt that something was wrong with his message. I remember having lots of questions that no one would answer directly for me. This led to skepticism about God from a very early age.

The event that I remember most about God as a child was being force to get baptized. When I say forced I mean that literally. I definitely did not want to participate in what I considered to be a useless ritual but I did not have a choice. My grandmother threatened me with bodily harm if I didn't go through with it and I knew that she would keep her word of "tearing me a new behind" if I did not go. According to the grownups in my life I had to be baptized in the name of the father the son and the Holy Spirit if I wanted to save my sinful soul.

Without question my greatest fear about being baptized was drowning. I was terrified that the minister had talked to God and found out about some of the sinful things that I had done. Now I was going to be punished. I just knew that he was going to hold my head underwater until I drowned and then say that it was an accident. Or maybe he would say that God called me home to be with him. Either way I knew it was the end for me.

As the minister motioned for me to step into the pool I wanted to turn around and run. Unfortunately there was a deacon standing behind me that would not allow that to happen. As I walked toward the minister I could hear the music in the background. It sounded more like a funeral than a baptism and that simply amplified my fear. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest as sweat continued to run down my face.

As I approached the minister I decided that I would trust the process and hopefully come out of it alive. As he grabbed my forehead and began saying his baptismal prayer I took a deep breath and hoped for the best. In an instant I was dunked in and out of the water and I was still alive. Hallelujah Jesus! I was still alive! As the minister finished up his prayer he detected a smile on my face. I'm sure he thought that I was filled with the Holy Spirit but the truth is I was simply glad he didn't drown me. I've heard some people say that they experience a profound spiritual feeling after being baptized. The only thing I felt was cold. The water was freezing and I simply wanted to get out of that pool and dry off.

As I think back in retrospect this one event probably shaped my perception of God more than anything else at the time. As a result of this experience I concluded that God;

1. Only spoke to ministers.

2. Created all of the pain in my life.
3. Would only listen to you if you prayed in church and paid your tithes.
4. Was someone/something you should be afraid of.

As I moved through adolescence and into my teenage years my skepticism and doubts about God continued. I didn't know exactly why I did not believe in God there was just something in me that needed concrete irrefutable proof.

As my doubts about God continued to grow I had an experience that challenged me to question my beliefs about God. One Sunday my mother and I were sitting in church and I noticed that she was crying. When I asked her what was wrong she said "nothing." As I listened to the sermon I did not detect anything in the ministers words that should have made my mother cry. I assumed that maybe she was sad about something that she just had not told me about. Either way I still wanted to know why she was crying. When I asked her once again why she was crying she answered "because I feel joy in my heart!" "What do you mean you feel joy in your heart" I asked. "Aren't you crying because you are sad?" "I'm not sad at all. I feel lots of love and gratitude in my heart right now and that is why I am crying" she said. This really confused me because I had always related tears to sadness and I had never felt so joyful that I cried. As I sat there and watched her weep I could feel the love in her heart. Somehow she was experiencing the presence of God right next to me. After that experience I decided that maybe I needed to rethink my beliefs about God and if I were lucky I would have the opportunity to feel the joy that she was feeling.

Isn't it amazing how seemingly simple events can completely shift your perceptions and perspectives about things? As a child, I grew up being afraid of God and denying its existence. As I grew older, I became open to the fact that my beliefs may have been incorrect and I became willing to look at things from a different perspective. This is what I mean when I talk about a new conversation. It is simply being willing to see things from a new and different perspective. The amazing thing to me is that it took my experience with my mother crying to change my mind about God. As a result of that experience I made room for the possibility that there was a God and that if I wanted to truly experience it I would have to get out of my head and into my heart where God really lives.

I must admit that I did go through a period in my adult life when I made a choice to become an Atheist. During this time I was experiencing several hardships in my life and it was difficult for me to be open to the existence of God. I had attempted to go back to church to alleviate some of the pain I was in, but, it simply added to the pain I was experiencing. I had so many unanswered questions about God that I simply concluded that there was no such thing.

After a few years of trying to convince myself that God wasn't real I remembered the experience of my mother so I set out to "feel" the love of God the way my mother did. Because of my commitment, I became willing to do whatever it took to feel the love

within me. I participated in several seminars and workshops that assisted me in my emotional healing. As a result of that healing, I reconnected to my feelings, which resulted in my ability to feel and experience God within me. I am now able to feel the love within me that has always been there. Because of this newfound understanding I have come to some new conclusions about God that I would like to share with you.

1. God speaks to all people all of the time. The question isn't to whom does God speak; the real question is who will actually listen.

2. God is literally Love. Love will never cause you pain or sorrow. If I ever experience pain I am the source of that pain not God. The only thing God is capable of is love.

3. You can have God without religion. It doesn't matter which faith you practice or what God you serve. God goes by many different names and when you are comfortable with any of the names you are definitely connected to God. There are many paths to God and just because someone is on a different path than you it does not mean that they are lost.

4. There is absolutely no reason to be afraid of God. God is love so you should never be afraid.

Of course these are my truths and I am not trying to convince you otherwise. I accomplished my goal of "feeling" the love of God within and I am happy and content with my relationship with my creator. My hope for you is that you seek out your truth and experience all the love God has in store for you.

If you have unanswered questions about God then it is up to you to find your own answers. Do not rely solely on ministers or gurus. Take some time and come to your own personal truth and understanding about God. Read books that offer insights and wisdom that may seem unconventional but speaks to your own spirit. Do not be afraid to try a different religion or belief system. Learn to trust your own inner wisdom to find the place that is right for you. If you are willing to look deep within yourself I can assure you that you can find the truth that sets you free.

The time is now for a new conversation about God.
Are you ready and willing to feel it for yourself?