



Salvation Stories

SALVATION IS A "BEFORE AND AFTER" EVENT!

Taking the Exam and the Defeat of the American Dream!

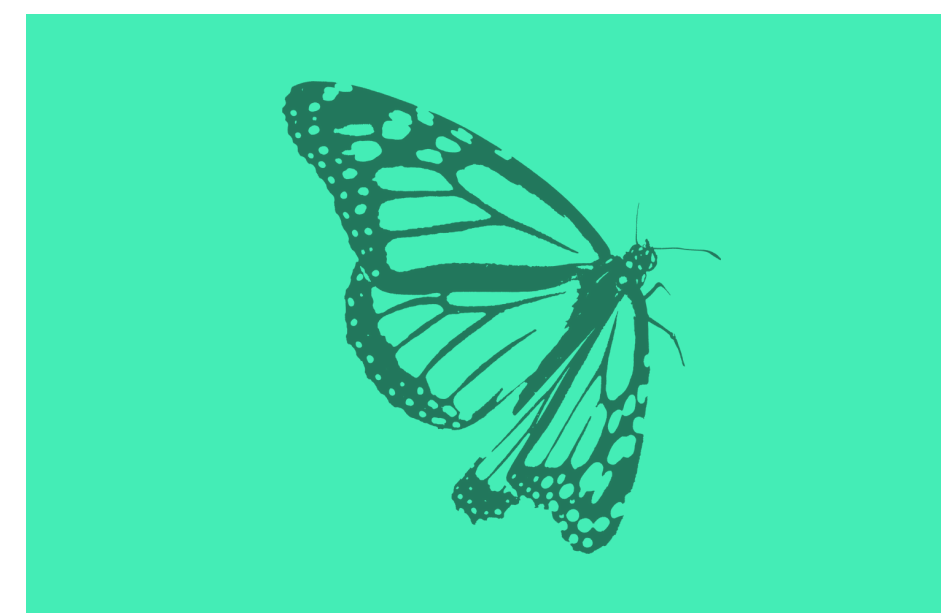
It was a typical humid afternoon in south Florida. I was 19 years old. There were only two things I cared about as a teenager: surfing and getting high. This particular afternoon the waves were flat; That left me with one other option. I had one pill of ecstasy, a bag of weed, and the house to myself. Not sure why I'd be having my own little private party that afternoon, as I had nothing to celebrate; I had just been arrested for the second time in my life, a couple weeks prior. That arrest was a violation of my probation for the first arrest, which only compounded my problems. My life was heading wrong direction quickly.

But that afternoon the party had a different ending. I still remember it like it was yesterday. I sat on the couch in my living room. I was strung out, and in one of the most shameful states of my entire life. The drugs were wearing off and I began to think about the embarrassment of a man I had become as I sat there. I began to ask myself some questions. And for the first time, I had the answers. In a period of about 90 minutes, it was as if every question I had about life was answered. All the seeds of truth my mother had planted during my early childhood years were being watered. The Holy Spirit had joined me that afternoon. I sat down on that couch blind; But when I arose, I could see. I remember getting in my car the next morning and looking at the stack of CDs in my console, and thinking to myself, I don't like any of this music anymore. I was a new man.

One year later I was enrolled in bible college in Dallas, Texas. I had no intentions of going into the ministry. I just knew I had a desire to study the Bible, know God more. I'm certain He was testing me also, to see if I would be willing to lay down my idol of surfing and follow Him.

Two years later I graduated with a Certificate of Practical Theology. Around that same time, I met my beautiful bride, Tiffany, and we were hitched one year later. But now I had a problem; I had to figure out how to provide for this girl. I didn't have the money or desire to go to college, and still didn't want to go into the ministry. So, I did what any normal person would do. I decided to become a real estate agent. Eight hundred bucks and eight weeks later, I had all the building blocks

Salvation



of something great: God, a wife, and a real estate license! Time to start building. So that's what I did. I was young, newly married, and ambitious. Tiffany and I began building a family, and pursuing what I think most would refer to as the American Dream.

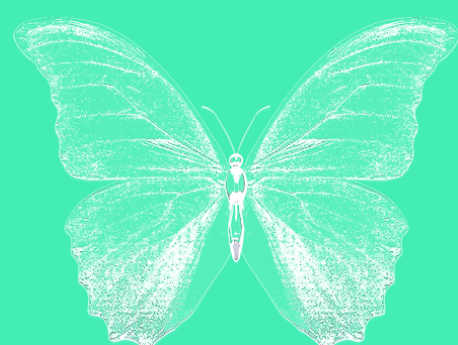
Success in real estate came quickly. I sold 50 homes my first full year in the business and won Rookie of the Year in my brokerage. Life was going well. Tiffany and I were making babies and making money. I think we would have been considered a typical Christian family in the Bible belt of America. We had a house, two cars, two kids, and went on two vacations a year. I did my quiet times in the morning. We gave our ten percent faithfully. We went to church on Sunday when it was convenient and lived a moral and upstanding life. What else is there?

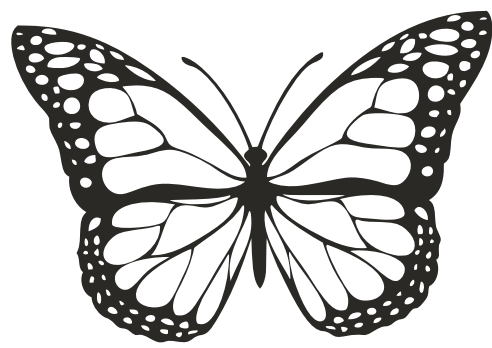
Fast forward about 20 years and its October of 2020. The kids are older. The house and cars had gotten a whole lot nicer. I now owned my own brokerage and I've got

about 100 agents working for me. We were on track to sell nearly 1100 homes. I was going to make more money than I ever dreamed I would make in one year. While the rest of the world had shut down for Covid, my wife and I had somehow managed to get away for 6 vacations. (don't judge me). Oh, and to top it all off, I was just under 6% body fat. We still went to church when it was convenient. I still did my quiet times. We still gave our ten percent. That was the year I realized I was no longer chasing the American dream; I had achieved it. In October I decided to take the rest of the year off. After all, I had earned it.

That time off marked the beginning of what would become the darkest, and most difficult season of my life. And yet at the same time it was the most beautiful season of my life. As I began to reflect on the life I had built, I came to the realization that I had achieved everything I had ever set out to achieve in life, and yet I was still discontent and unfulfilled. As I began to think about 2021 and the next goal I would set, I found no motivation, anywhere! The money, the toys, the vacations, the body, none of it excited me anymore. I had already attained those things and was still empty. Yet I didn't have a choice, because I had created a life, and an image, that now had to be maintained. I was trapped. I was slowly realizing how tired and exhausted I really was. The thought of going back to work made me nauseous. I was being crushed by the weight of the life I had created. I was being suffocated by it. I literally felt like I couldn't breathe. I was now slipping into a severe depression that would last nearly a year.

As I did when I was 19, I looked at my life and began to ask myself some questions. But this time the questions were much more difficult, and the answers didn't come near as easily. I had read the Bible. I knew the word. And I knew something was terribly wrong. There was a life the scriptures say was available to me, that I was not experiencing.





Salvation

As far as I could tell, that book said I was supposed to be walking in a peace that surpasses all understanding, a joy that is unspeakable. It said the believer has true contentment available to them. But when I looked back over the last 20 years of my Christian walk, I did not find these things. I saw a man whose peace, and joy, and contentment, were constantly rising and falling based on the number of pending transactions he had on the books, the amount of money he had in the bank account, how much body fat he saw in the mirror, and how far away the next vacation was. My tree was not producing genuine fruit, and I knew what Jesus said about trees that don't produce fruit. The self-examination had now begun.

It was now time for me to deal with those difficult passages. I thought about Jesus' words, "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Mathew 7:14) Was I on a narrow road with few other travelers? Or was I really on the same path as everyone else in America? Was my life really any different than the unbeliever?

I thought about that popular phrase of Jesus, "He who seeks to save His life will lose it, but he who loses his life for my sake will find it?" (Luke 17:33) Had I lost my life for His sake? I thought of my friends, Jeff and Stephanie, who had left America and moved to Kenya to start an orphanage. I knew they had lost their life for His sake. But had I? I knew everyone wasn't called to the mission field. What would it even look like for a business owner and father in America, in my generation, to "lose his life" for the Kingdom? I wondered, Is it possible that I have been giving just enough of my life to Him, to ease my own conscience, so that all the while, I could go on building my own kingdom? What if I've gotten this whole thing completely wrong? I looked around me and wondered, has the American church gotten the entire thing wrong?

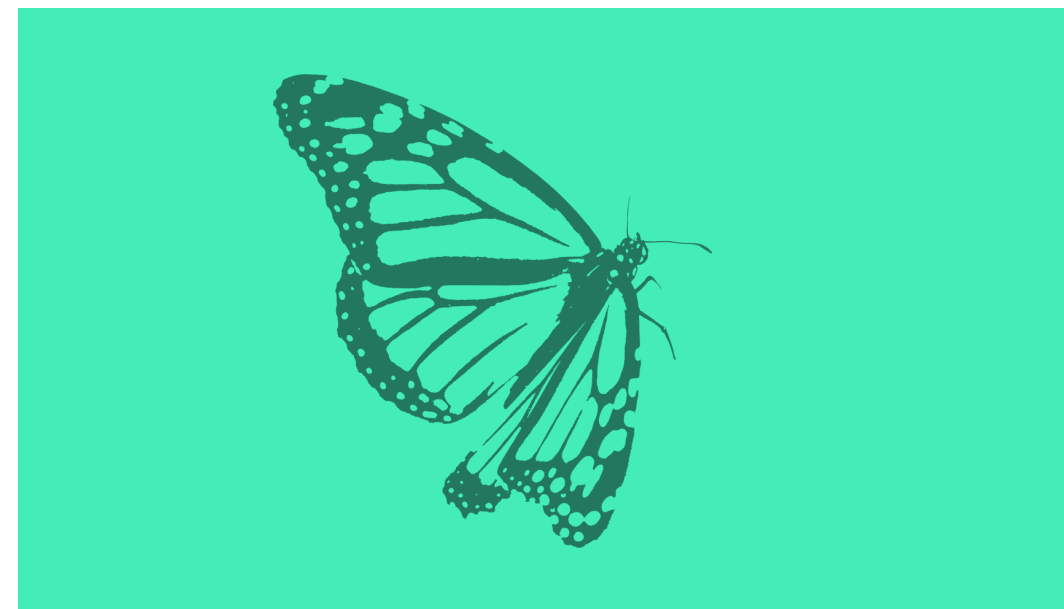
Is it possible the American Dream is a trap, and that we must choose between this life or that one? Is it possible Jesus actually meant the things He said?

The season was dark, and the examination became more difficult with each passage I wrestled with. Of all those passages, there was one that haunted me more than any. It exposed the question looming beneath the surface; Was / really who I thought I was? Would I be one of those ones, on that day, who would cry out to Him, "Lord, Lord...." Only to hear those horrific words... " never knew you". (Mathew 7:23) Is it possible I've deceived myself?

I wrestled with the questions and the depression for nearly a year, until the night of October 19, 2021. I remember that date because it's my birthday. We had been in Colorado doing a college visit for my daughter, Madeline. I couldn't sleep that night and went out to the living room of our hotel so I wouldn't wake up Tiff. I ended up watching two different videos that night. The first was a short YouTube video by John Piper, titled, "Why I Abominate the Prosperity Gospel", It resonated with me deeply and confirmed many of the things I had been wrestling with. More than anything though, I believe it primed the soil of my heart for the second video: A seventeen-minute testimonial video about a couple named Alan and Katherine Barnhart.

I was gripped from the first words that came out of Alan's mouth, "In our society we think of business success as a blessing. I think business success is much more dangerous than failure". He was acknowledging the dangers of the prison I was currently sitting in. In light of those dangers, he and His wife chose to do something

Salvation



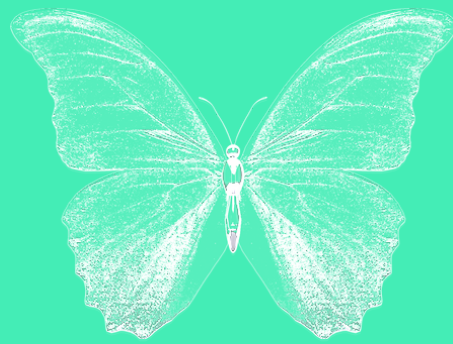
radical! They capped their personal income and gave everything else to the Kingdom. They had removed their personal ambitions from the equation entirely. They laid their entire business at His feet. God took what they gave Him and multiplied it exponentially. By the time I finished that video I was weeping. I was wrecked. For the first time, I saw a Christian man in America, who was successful in business, and had lost his life. He laid down the American Dream. No! He did more than lay it down. He defeated it. The video was over, but I still sat there, with tears



running down my face, reflecting on what I had just watched. It was in that moment I finally settled something within my heart. The American Dream was a lie! The entire system was a lie, and I was no longer buying it. I was done. I rejected it. I chose sides. I chose a Kingdom. And in that very moment, I felt something lift. I immediately knew something had changed. I had been set free. The idol came crashing down, and God took His rightful place on the throne of my heart. That night, on my birthday, God delivered me.

The dark night of my soul was now over, but God was not done. That night marked the beginning of a reformation in my theology, and a revival in my heart, that has lasted up until this day. The deep and beautiful things God has showed me during this season will have to be the subject of another white paper, for a different year. But for now, if you will bear with me a little longer, I have a few thoughts and takeaways I would like to share.

A SWORD IS COMING - I now find myself deeply grieved for the state of the "church" in America. The American Dream has taken the church captive. It is the pursuit of money. It is the pursuit of selfish ambition. It is the pursuit of safety and comfort and ease in this life. It is the very antithesis of everything the Gospel represents, and the mission that believers have been called to.



It is a slap in the face to those who have gone before us and given their lives for Him and this message. It is a slap in the face to those in other countries who are suffering persecution, even now, as I write these words. We should violently oppose it. The very thought of it should cause a righteous fury to well up within us. God said to Ezekiel, "if the watchmen sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet and the people are not warned...his blood I will require from the watchman's hand. (Ezekiel 33:6) My friends, we must warn the professing church in America. Our Master meant what He said. We do not get this life, and that one. We must choose! Because a sword is coming.

A PATH TO REVIVAL - But we cannot warn others until we have first examined ourselves. We must go through the fire first. Revival in America will not come by people gathering in a building and singing songs for days. It will come when the individual believer becomes so broken, and empty, and crushed, by this world system, that they are finally willing to open the scriptures and deal with the hard things He said. Revival will come when the individual believer asks themselves: Do I really believe what this book says? Do I really? Do I really believe people are going to be thrown into a lake of fire, as I pass them each day, and say nothing? Do I really believe this book is the Word of the Living God, as it collects dust while I watch Netflix? Do I really believe the "end of all things is near" (1Peter4:7), as I stack up money in my investment accounts, and build my kingdom? Do I really believe I have to choose between two lives? Do I really believe? When the "believer" is willing to take the exam, then we will have our revival!

Lastly, I want to say thank you to Alan and Katherine Barnhardt. If either one of you ever has a chance to read this white paper, I want you to know that I will be eternally grateful for the life you have lived, the example you have set, and your willingness to share your story. You will always be in my prayers. Your crowns will be radiant with splendor, as you shine like the brightness of the heavens ...like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:3) Thank You!