

I love the Lord because...

Kathleen Jones, December 30, 2007

I have lived my life without God; I have lived my life with God, but without Jesus; and now I am living my life with God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. I can definitely tell you which one I prefer. I was not raised in a Christian home. My dad wanted nothing to do with religion or church, but when I was in elementary school, my mom took me to Sunday School for awhile. She didn't go to church but she would drop me off. I never understood that as a child. But when I first learned in Sunday School about God/Jesus, I remember thinking "that's whose been with me". Because I always felt like someone was with me, but I couldn't see anybody. I only went to Sunday School for a short time.

I accepted Jesus in my heart and life on March 31, 2000. I was 14 1/2 years sober in Alcoholics Anonymous. When I first got into AA I didn't want anything to do with God, but I wanted to stop drinking and doing drugs soooo bad, I was willing to do anything. I am grateful because my sponsor told me to start praying to God in the morning on my knees and at night on my knees. And when I told her I didn't believe in God, she said that didn't matter that I was just to do it. Eventually I could feel God and there were incredible things happening and I knew there was a God. But I didn't want anything to do with Jesus (because I was scared). I would go to church off and on with friends and prayed everyday, but my heart would feel full and then it would feel empty again. I felt there was something missing, and then I had a girlfriend who was saved and would share things with me. I had alot of things happening in my life, two toddlers, my mom sick and then died, my marriage falling apart. I didn't know I could have Jesus and AA in my life together until I was at an AA friends funeral and heard he was a man of Jesus. I started crying and couldn't stop. I felt something in my heart change, but I didn't know what at the time. I called my girlfriend and she talked to me more about Jesus and I knew I was suppose to ask Jesus in my heart and life. And I did! I went to my girlfriends house and we went for a walk and afterwards I asked Jesus into my heart and life. My heart became full that night and has remained so ever since, no matter what is happening in my life.

What was so exciting was my friend gave me scripture to read and I understood for the first time what the bible was saying. That was the start of my journey and life with My Lord Jesus Christ. So much has changed in almost 8 years, outside and inside. My two youngest children and my two granddaughters have accepted Jesus in their hearts and lives and three of them have been baptized and I am waiting for their mom's ok for my youngest granddaughter to be baptized. I trust God and I have choices today. I started going to a home fellowship group 4 years ago and my spiritual maturity has gone through the roof.

I love the Lord because he heard my voice, He heard my cry for mercy. God has given me grace (He has given me what I don't deserve) and mercy (He has not given me what I do deserve!). Thank you Lord. I have many gifts I didn't realize I had and gifts I didn't see how they would ever be used. All the hurts and pain I've experienced have given me a compassion and love for others that is incredible. I thank the Lord all the time and pray to keep seeking His face and be obedient to Him. I heard a speaker once talk about the difference between trust and faith. He said to picture yourself at a circus sitting in the audience waiting for the highwire act. Your sitting there relaxed with your arms crossed having faith that they will walk across the wire and be ok. Trust is when you get in the wheelbarrow that is going to be pushed across the wire. I am in God's wheelbarrow – I am trusting Him to push me across the wire and I know I am going to be ok no matter what.

A little over two years ago I went to court to get back the physical custody of my two youngest children. On the day we went to court I knew it would be hard. I knew there would be horrible things said about me, but I also knew in my heart that I needed to fight for my kids, that my kids needed to know I was fighting for them. That day happened just like I thought it would – the judge decided the kids should stay with their dad. I was devastated – this isn't suppose to happen – I was 20 years sober, I work at a church! That day especially was so wrapped up in prayer that I knew if God wanted me to have the kids He would make it happen, no matter what. I was willing to trust God. I didn't

like it – I didn't want it to be this way, but I would trust Him no matter what. He had plans for the kids and He had plans for me, they just weren't the same plans I had. The next day I was still devastated, but I had a peace in my heart that went beyond all understanding. I told God no matter how this feels I will trust Him, but He will have to help me get through this, because the pain is too much for me to bear.

The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. The Lord protects the simplehearted, when I was in great need He saved me. Hurricane Katrina & Hurricane Rita happened and I had a longing on my heart to help. I didn't know how I could help because I had never done anything like that before. I heard Pastor Rick Warren say that God is not looking for your abilities, he is looking for your availability. When you make yourself available to God, He will give you the abilities He needs. A light went on and I said ok God I am available to you. I want to go on a disaster relief team to Louisiana. I am not a camper, I don't know scripture by heart, I need my curling iron! But I will make myself available to you. Two weeks after the court date I found myself on a plane with 60 other people going to Louisiana. 30 people went to Slidell and 30 people went to Lake Charles. I went to Lake Charles – I was trained to use a chainsaw. We worked through Trinity Baptist Church and went to people's houses to cut trees and clear their yards. People needed a smile, touch, encouragement and prayer. They needed someone to listen to their stories. One day while we were taking a break, a woman came up to us and wanted to know who we were and how much we charged. We told her we worked through Trinity Baptist and we didn't charge anything. She told us about a man (Robbie) that really needed our help. His home was a mess plus he lost his wife about a year and half before Hurricane Rita and had lost all hope. So our leaders went and checked out his house and came back and said that was where we were going next. When we got there, there was a lot of damage from the trees and a lot needed to be cut – there was a lot of work needed there. This man's house inside was filthy with six dogs inside, and with mice and cockroaches running about. After his wife died he lost all hope and wanted to die. When Hurricane Rita hit, he didn't leave, he stayed in his home and sat at the kitchen table with his bible open and was praying for God to take him. Obviously God had other

plans for him. There was a man (Jon) on the team who had also lost his wife to cancer and is married now to a woman who lost her husband. They had started a grief recovery group at Saddleback and had wrote a workbook they used in this group. At one point I looked over and saw about five people holding hands with Robbie and praying for him. Jon just happened to have this grief recovery book in the van (the one he used, with all his little notes in it). After he prayed with Robbie, he gave Robbie this book and told Robbie his story of losing his wife and his pain and his recovery. It was incredible. We had to go back to Robbie's house the next morning to finish cleaning up and Robbie was a different person. There was a sparkle in his eyes that wasn't there before and he had a clean shirt on. A couple of the team members stayed in contact with Robbie and he had hope again – he had changed completely. In fact one of the team members lost their mother and Robbie made a copy of the recovery book, called "Book of Hope" and mailed it to her. Here was a man without hope and wanted to die and then he became a man with hope and was helping another. God is amazing!

One afternoon April came up to me and asked me to go across the street with her because the neighbor was beckoning her. We weren't suppose to do anything alone. So I went with her. The neighbor wanted to know who we were and what we were doing. It always amazed people that we weren't charging for helping to clean up! She wanted to tell us her story of the hurricane. I asked her if she wanted us to pray for her and she said YES! Now I was scared because I didn't know how to pray out loud with anyone (I always let other people do that!). So I asked if there was anything specific she wanted us to pray about and then we held hands and bowed our heads. I looked up and told April to go first and she looked at me and said no, you go first. (What I didn't know until later is that April had never done this before either and was just as terrified as I was). So I started and April finished. We did it! We were thanking the Lord so much. When I got back from this trip, a couple weeks later when I was working at community church, a woman came in the office and asked to talk to a pastor and no one was there but me. I could tell she was really upset about something and when I told her the pastor wasn't there she became more upset. I told her that I was a good listener if she wanted to talk I would listen and she just broke down crying. So I

listened. While I was listening God told me to pray for her (of course, I said to God, not me, I'm not good at that). So I asked her if she wanted me to pray for her and she said yes. So we stood there and held hands and I prayed for her. Afterwards, we hugged and she told me what she had been missing is faith. I thanked God for helping me to step out of my comfort zone for this woman. I have had several times where people have come to the church to talk to a pastor and there hasn't been one available and God has led me to listen to them and pray for them. It does get a little easier the more you do it and realize it's not you, it's all God and the Holy Spirit.

For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul – from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living. I have been to New Orleans on five disaster relief trips and one trip I co-led with a friend. I have gutted out houses, gutted out a church, emptied homes of all their stuff that had been in there for months, picked up garbage that had mice jump out of it, pulled out drywall with tons of cockroaches and silverfish behind it, slept in places I never thought I'd sleep, peed in places I never thought I'd pee in, put up drywall, put in insulation, frame a window, I have been in homes with green, yellow and black mold, I have also come across the biggest spider I have ever seen in my life at a house we were gutting out and I didn't totally freak out (only a little). Every time I have gone on a mission trip I go to serve and to bless and what always happens is I get served and I get blessed way beyond the people I am there to help. I have found my Father's heart in the people of New Orleans. I have listened to many heartbreaking, gutwrenching stories about what happened during Katrina and afterward. I can't even begin to understand or imagine living through what they have all lived through. But God is a God of hope and encouragement and love. My friend Rev. Emanuel Smith of Israelite Baptist Church in downtown New Orleans has been an incredible man of God through this whole thing. He and his wife Diana lost everything in the hurricane. They have been living in a FEMA trailer on the church parking lot until this month. 60 percent of his congregation was displaced from the hurricane. He has been a rock (he tells me he's not the rock – our Lord Jesus Christ is the rock). He hasn't received a salary since Hurricane Katrina. He is there for everybody, pastors, his congregation, people on the streets, and for us

that come to help him and his congregation. I used to call myself a baby Christian or a new Christian until I met Rev. Smith. He told me words were very powerful and if I called myself a baby then I would act like a baby. He told me that we were all Christians. I love the Lord because He has put people in my life to teach me about Him. I was on the team that gutted out Rev. Smith's house, I was on the team that started rebuilding his house (my children Jake & Jamie were on that trip), and in October I was on a team of 24 people trying to finish up Rev. Smith's house.

How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people.

God has really put it on my heart to do missions – especially disaster relief. I have a heart for people who are hurting (mentally, physically, emotionally or spiritually). I have a heart for people who have lost everything. Because I have lost everything, I have been hurt and been in so much pain (mentally, emotionally, physically, & spiritually). I also know my Lord can heal anything. Because He has in my heart and in my life. **In James 1:25...there is no lack of power where healing is concerned. And there is no lack of power where the Word of God is concerned. It is the perfect law of liberty. It will always set you free when you continue to apply it every day of your life.** Our obedience to the Word releases the power within the Word. In the last two years I have gone through Disaster Relief Training, two Chaplain trainings and another one is coming up in February, and 30 weeks of training to be a lay counselor at Saddleback Church. Today I am so grateful to be a part of the counseling ministry at Saddleback Church. Also I went on my first international mission trip in November. It was a disaster relief team to Peru to help the earthquake survivors. I have come a long way because I don't use a curling iron anymore and on this trip I didn't even use my blow dryer!! There are 3 shelters set up in Pisco, Peru for the earthquake survivors and we worked in those shelters. We took down tents, played with the kids (my friend Michele and I brought nail polish and boy was that a hit!), we evangelized, we were there to serve not to solve, we were there to do whatever they wanted us to do to help

them. Pastor Kenny who was running the camps took us out to farming communities that were affected by the earthquake and we brought dried fruit and clothes and we evangelized. One time after we gave our testimonies an older woman brought her granddaughter up to us and wanted us to pray for her because this little girl was being told by the devil that he was going to kill her. So we laid hands on her and started praying. I have not experienced the power of the Holy Spirit before like I did during that time of praying. It was so powerful I could hardly stand up. Afterwards this little girl's whole countenance had changed, she was smiling and laughing. Pastor Kenny asked this grandmother if the little girl's father was into devil worshipping and the grandmother said no but her husband, the grandfather was a witch doctor. The grandmother then asked us to come to her farm and pray for her husband! So we got in the trucks drove further into the country and went to their home. I felt like I was in old testament times – it was desert, miles of sand of dirt, they had a goat farm, we saw a woman washing clothes in the creek and a little farther down the creek there was a cow in the same creek the woman was washing clothes in. Their home was more like a big hut. The grandfather didn't want us to come in but Pastor Kenny talked to him through the bamboo. I don't know what was said because it was all in Spanish, but while Pastor Kenny was talking we were all praying. You could feel the resistance. Finally he allowed us to come inside. He was making goat cheese. One of Pastor Kenny's team started talking to him about making goat cheese and they talked a long time. After a while he let us lay hands on him and pray. It was so amazing. It was a miracle. This man (a witch doctor of his community) accepted Jesus in his heart right there. We were all crying, the grandmother was crying, it was absolutely incredible. And the grandfather had a smile on his face and he asked us to pray for his animals. So we went outside and started praying for his animals.

Why do I go on mission trips? **For one thing in Mark 16:15, He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation”.** For another thing, this is what God has put on my heart. I am here to serve God and in serving God I am to serve His people. On all my trips it is real clear that it means so much to them to have people come from different states or a different country to help them. They always need

to know people care and by being there in person you are showing them how much you care. It is priceless.

I love the Lord because...He says, never will I forsake you, never will I leave you; He is the same yesterday, today and forever; cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you. I love the Lord because I am totally forgiven, I am fully accepted, deeply loved, and a daily empowered child of God.

What is your because? Do you have a because? If you don't have a because I challenge you to ask the Lord to show you, open your heart to Him, and all the love He has for you, let Him in to heal your heart. He wants to love you.

Jeremiah 29:13: And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Let us bow our heads to pray....

Psalm 116

**I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy.
Because He turned his ear to me, I will call on Him as long as I live.**

**The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me,
I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.**

Then I called on the name of the Lord: O'Lord, save me!"

**The Lord is gracious and righteous, our Lord is full of compassion.
The Lord protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, He saved me.**

Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you.

**For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling,
that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living.
I believed, therefore I said, "I am greatly afflicted."
And in my dismay I said, "All men are liars."**

**How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me?
I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.
I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people.**

**Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.
O Lord, truly I am your servant, I am your servant, the son of your maidservant,
you have freed me from my chains.**

**I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord.
I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all His people,
in the courts of the house of the Lord – in your midst, O Jerusalem.
Praise the Lord.**