

The Daniel Niceley Story

“My Pilgrimage From Body Builder to Body Edifier”

I was born in Knoxville Tennessee on October 14, 1958 to a newly married Christian couple. They raised me in a home where Christian values and principles were a way of life. My parents not only talked of the Christian life often, but lived it out on a daily basis. As I grew, I was taken to church practically every Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday night. This was the normal routine in my household until I left home to be married. This is what is referred to as the period of living in Egypt according to Dr. Charles Solomon in his book entitled, Handbook to Happiness. "Our life during the time in Egypt is characterized by sin. We are born in sin, and we live in sin until the blood of Christ has dealt with the guilt of that sin." [1]

At age ten, I was living in Georgia and attending First Baptist Church of Dalton. In the fall of 1968, a young evangelist named Roy Fish came to my church to preach a week of revival services. During that week of revival services, God spoke to my heart about something in my life that was missing. The evangelist along with the pastor came out to my home and shared the Gospel of Christ with me on the last Saturday of the revival. I received Christ as my Savior and was baptized the following Sunday. "God's solution to the problem of sin in the believer's life is based on his identification with Christ." [2] This event is referred to as crossing the Red Sea. "It certainly took a miracle to open the Red Sea, and it takes a miracle of grace to change the human heart at salvation." [3]

God and His principles were very important to me throughout my life, but I spent the next 25 years searching for this abundant life in the wrong way. [Christ declared] "The thief comes only to kill, and to steal, and to destroy, but I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly" ([John 10:10](#)). [4] I was only following what I had been taught and what I saw other Christians doing. I prayed a lot and God guided me, but I spent much of my life asking God to give His approval to my agenda. I was taught to work for everything that I got in life, and I worked hard to achieve the goals that I had set for myself. Effort equals results was the focus of my life, while staying within God's boundaries. A large part of my life was spent pursuing goals that would build my self-esteem through achievements. This is the time in my life when a fire began to burn inside of me to prove to myself that I had worth. This period of my life is more commonly called "the wilderness." It is a time after salvation that Christians search for direction. "The wilderness is a picture of what the New Testament describes as the carnal Christian." [5]

Little did I know that this burning desire inside of me was put there by God. I then began to try to quench this fire by a series of events that were fueled by self-effort. I joined the Boy Scouts of America. I worked hard at the merit badge system, and through years of work, I achieved the top rank of Eagle Scout. I also played basketball in junior high school as well as running track in high school. After high school, I began to work out with weights. My body responded well, and I began to compete in bodybuilding competitions. This also boosted my self-esteem which resulted in a new interest -- girls! I dated quite a bit, and in 1978 I met a girl that would one day become my wife.

This was a gift from God on a major scale. In 1982, I won the prestigious Mr. Knoxville title, as well as placing third in the Mr. Tennessee that year. In 1983, I was preparing for the collegiate national competition and had a severe reaction to one of the supplements that I was taking. This was God's way of saying to me that I had run as far from Him as He would allow me to go at this point in my life. I could only describe this event as a dog running as fast as it could run until the chain around its neck reached its limit. I had reached the end of my boundary with God and He was trying to get me to focus on Him and His gifts, not what I could do. This event drew my girlfriend and I together closer than ever, and on November 3, 1984 we were married.

The fire inside of me had calmed down, but only temporarily. In 1985 we bought our first high performance jet boat. I'm sure you can guess what happened next. I fell right back into my pattern of competition and self-validation. I began to race the boat in local events which led to bigger engines and faster boats to come. I did well in drag boat racing and set 12 national speed and elapse-time records, as well as winning the high-points championship in 1992.

In 1995, I was racing in Fort Worth Texas and had moved up into a higher professional category called "Pro Gas Jet." When racing, I would always spend much time in prayer on the starting line, asking God to give me a fast and safe race. However, this particular time, I did not have the normal amount of time to spend praying to God so I just said, "Give me what I need." God heard my prayer and gave me exactly what I needed. However, what I asked for and what God gave me were two entirely different things. Eight seconds after I left the starting line, just about the time I went through the finish line, a large gust of wind came across the course and my boat, with me in it, went airborne at 125 m.p.h. To make a long story short, I ended up in the hospital on life support with a broken left femur in two places and three fractured vertebrae in my back. I was having complications which consisted of a lack of oxygen to my brain and internal bleeding which caused my organs to begin to shut down. A ventilator was used to keep my lungs functioning and many units of blood were given to keep my organs alive, but to no avail. I was dying! As I lay in that hospital bed, God's people prayed that God would give me my life back. God heard and answered those prayers because after four days, I woke up. God gave me my life back, but it was a different life. This event is called "crossing the Jordan River." It is the time when the Christian discovers his true identity as a child of God.

In many ways, I really did die at this time in my life. God did something inside of me that, even to this day, I cannot fully explain. He took away a part of me that had begun as a child -- a burning desire to succeed, to prove that I was not a loser and a failure. This was replaced with God's overpowering and consuming love. God let me experience just a taste of His love during that time, and it was more than I had the capacity to fully contain. I knew for the first time in my life that I was acceptable to God just the way I was, and I did not have to do anything to gain His love or approval. This unconditional love is really what I had been searching for my entire life, I just did not know it. After this experience, I knew that I was forever God's child and acceptable to him no matter what I did or did not do in the future. I had experienced true unconditional love.

What I was seeking from the world, myself, my parents, my mate, and friends, God had given to me, i.e. complete validation and acceptance. My life was not a failure! I did have worth, not because of some achievement I had accomplished, but because He had made me and He loves me. This was like a huge weight that had been taken off of my back. I was now free to live in this love that God had shown me, and I did not have to live in a works-based state of approval seeking.

God had to allow me to be in a situation where I could do nothing for myself. I could not even take a breath of air under my own strength. He did this because of my arrogant attitude. He had given me a life to be lived under His direction, and I was foolishly risking and wasting my life for my own pleasure. I did not give my life much value and it showed. I believed in the American dream that if you work hard enough you can achieve your dreams. I thought that I deserved all the notoriety that I was getting by winning bodybuilding titles and boat races because I had worked hard and sacrificed to do so. God wanted me to know that I can do nothing, not even take a breath, unless He approves. This is what the Bible calls "the fear of God" --knowing that He is in control of everything and you are not. I had now moved into the promised land, Canaan. "Canaan, [is] the Bible picture of the Spirit-filled, victorious Christian." [6] I had received the Holy Spirit when I was saved at the age of ten, but now I was Spirit-filled.

My focus now is not to get God's approval on my will but rather to do His will and to know Him more intimately. My new goal is to allow the Holy Spirit to conform me into the image of Christ so that every thought and action in my life is pleasing to Him. Instead of complaining about the things in life that I do not like or do not have, I spend a lot of my time thanking God for the things that He has given me and has allowed me to do as His child. God has strengthened my faith through the progression of events in my life. I have learned to trust Him and love Him more with each passing day. God has opened my eyes to His ways and He has given me the ability to think more spiritually. He has given me a greater capacity to understand Scripture, along with helping me to discover my spiritual gifting.

I believe my gifting is in the area of teaching, so I am currently taking steps to maximize this spiritual gift by spending many hours studying God's Word, Teaching the Scripture is my way of edifying--building up--the church, the Body of Christ. For the past four years, I have been teaching a college and career Sunday school class at my church, as well as conducting numerous Bible studies. This has increased my dependence on God not only for what to teach, but also on how to teach it. God has shown me much by allowing me to serve out a two-year internship at my local church. I have been involved in most every area of church life and have learned much that will help me to focus on the direction that God would have me to go. He is also guiding me every step of the way, along the path that He has set before me. It is a path of faith and dependence on God's character, not on my ability or effort.

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- [1] Dr. Charles R. Solomon, Handbook to Happiness, (Wheaton: Tyndale), 57.
- [2] J. Dwight Pentecost, Designed to be like Him, (Grand Rapids: Kregel). 107.
- [3] Dr. Charles R. Solomon, Handbook to Happiness, (Wheaton: Tyndale), 54.
- [4] John MacArthur, MacArthur Study Bible, (Nashville:Thomas Nelson), 1603.
- [5] Major W. Ian Thomas, The Saving Life of Christ, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 41.
- [6] Major W. Ian Thomas, The Saving Life of Christ, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 48.

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<http://gracenotebook.com/s/adj.pl?b=rdu&rtm=http://www.thorngrovebaptistchurch.org&rtc=tggcLmmjjj0gtbeasebiqnMcgufgotheot0bes>. He has earned a **Master's degree** from Luther Rice Seminary and is a part time counselor at GFI. His e-mail address is: **dniceley@comcast.net**