

Professor Justin Marks' Testimony

November 2019 (36 years old)

$\sigma(36) = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 6 + 9 + 12 + 18 + 36 = 91 > 72$ (abundantly composite!)

The following passage has consistently resonated with my heart throughout my Christian journey. It is the “theme verse” for my life, if you will.

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Cor 3:17-18 (ESV)

I was raised by Christian parents, my father Jeff and mother Jean, in Palo Alto, CA. I had two and a half years as an only child, and then met my sister Kimberly. My father was the administrator of a Christian home for handicapped children called Green Pastures (GP). My mom was not working at first, and later did floral crafts and coordinated weddings. I remember visiting GP quite often, and going to church with my parents on Sundays.

I made a decision to invite Jesus into my heart when I was five years old. I was baptized shortly afterwards, on an Easter Sunday morning. While I believe that this choice was genuine, my life did not reflect true faith, as evidenced by my lifestyle in Jr. High and High School. In 7th grade I found myself entirely depressed and filled with worry, placing all of my self-worth in academic achievement and general perfectionism. I found help in a counselor and was able to overcome some aspects of my misplaced identity. I stopped pushing myself quite so hard in school, allowing for more freedom in my life.

However my life was not on track with God. In 8th grade, I began living a double life, one consisting of the mask of a good student and overall good person, and one of hidden sin. I reached high school and immediately ceased attending church when it was no longer compulsory. I made friends, but did not have many Christian influences.

Within the first two years of high school, my sister developed severe emotional/physical issues which affected our entire family. The history of the relationship between my sister and me was of irritation, feud, and moments of deep hatred. Due to my sister's struggles, I was called to forget our past battles in order to fight on behalf of her survival. I discovered that my influence and attitude towards her were significant. Therefore, I laid aside my pride to love her, seek her well-being, and encourage her. This was a sacrifice, but since that season I have seen our relationship turn from bitterness to a lasting friendship that I cherish.

During my senior year of high school I explored options for college. Although I visited many schools in California, only one stood out in my mind, which was Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA. I only applied to Westmont and Stanford, was denied from Stanford, and gladly accepted my invitation to attend Westmont. This must have been due to the leading of the Holy Spirit, because Westmont is a Christian College. Although my life was not submitted to God, He put a strong desire in me to attend Westmont.

The summer prior to beginning at Westmont, I began a relationship with a girl who I met playing badminton. She was beautiful, very intelligent, fun, and seemingly everything I wanted in a girlfriend. However, on a choir retreat my first semester at Westmont, a friend of mine pointed out the sinfulness of my relationship with my girlfriend, and God met me and allowed me to find a place of tearful repentance. I called my girlfriend and told her I needed to break up, and she surprised me by saying that it was the greatest compliment she had ever received to call our relationship “sin”. In fact, she explained that she loathed Christians and had some partnership with the forces of darkness. Thank God I escaped that trap of the enemy! This moment of repentance was when I gave my life to the Lord, as an adult.

During Westmont my life was further transformed to be in line with the Word of God. I was in a residence hall with a wonderful Resident Assistant who modeled what it meant to be a man of God, in his relationship with his girlfriend, his humility before us, his vulnerability, and his hospitality. I found myself wanting to grow more and more into the image of Christ. My sophomore year I lived with a phenomenal section of guys, and we developed some wonderful, lasting relationships. I had two trips to study abroad, in Sri Lanka for a month and in Europe for a semester. These trips developed general appreciation for the world God had created and the shining truth of the Gospel that is for all nations. In addition, God began to do a work in my heart to make me want to give back to Westmont the intangible riches I had received, as an RA. My senior year as an RA consisted of growing in leadership, experiencing verbal persecution for righteousness, and an increased dependency upon God and others. I found that I could count on persecution, even from those claiming to be Christians, when I drew lines to distinguish right from wrong.

One key event occurred during Christmas break my junior year at Westmont. I had just returned from Europe Semester, and spoke to my childhood best-friend Adam on the phone about my trip. He said he would be back in a few days to visit his family, which lived on my block. However, I received word a couple days later that he had shot himself and died. This was traumatizing for me, because he had been such a close friend through the years. We had not seen each other as much during the college years, but I was still grieved. After many tears with my parents and sister, I wrote a eulogy for Adam and was able to share my fond memories of him with his family and friends. I wished I could have told him I loved him, and shared more of the good news of Jesus with him. This was a time that God woke me up and challenged me to be a man. Too many people are oblivious to the truth of their separation from God due to their sin, and their need for God’s forgiveness. Jesus made reconciliation with God possible when he died on the cross and rose again, and I wished I could have told Adam more about it. God used Adam’s suicide to help me step into a more mature and devoted faith. Romans 8:28 sums it up, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

Towards the end of Westmont I was encouraged to pursue graduate studies in mathematics, with the end goal of becoming a professor. I applied to about ten schools this time, but was only accepted to two: UCSB and CSU. CSU offered a generous Teaching Assistantship. The prospect of moving states was at the same time intimidating and a welcome adventure, so I choose CSU. Again, I think this was by the leading of God.

I knew one person in Colorado, my friend Nathan, who led a college ministry at CSU. I immediately got involved with that ministry and at a retreat I decided to be baptized again. I had been thinking about being baptized since my repentance at Westmont, but never took the opportunity. The first summer in Colorado I lived in Boulder and focused on evangelism. It was incredible to see God use me in my weakness to help others see the truth and choose Jesus over the world. I experienced some awesome divine encounters, realizing the truth of Eph 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

During my first couple years in Colorado, I began to experience the encouragement of the Holy Spirit through prophecy, testimonies of physical healing, and words of knowledge and wisdom. My friends Isaac and Britney helped my heart to mature in Christ. Britney's prayers were instrumental in drawing me out of some spiritual darkness and depression. She shared her dreams regarding me, which taught me of God's tender compassion for me. For instance, Britney dreamt that she was carrying me in a box, and soon the box had shrunk and only enclosed my head. God had done a work in bringing me freedom through Isaac and Britney.

Soon thereafter, I discovered that God had given me a heart to pursue the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts. Many of my closest friends shared with me the value of the prayer language God had given them, and I started to see the importance of speaking in tongues. In addition, I read some books that helped open my eyes to the Biblical foundation of spiritual gifts. Although I had seen some fruit in ministry, I found that I needed to rely more on the Holy Spirit and less on my own abilities. In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Paul speaks of the need for the power of the Holy Spirit. "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

Many factors combined to draw me to a new church, Grace, at CSU. One was the desire to seek the Presence and gifts of the Holy Spirit, while my previous church taught that spiritual gifts were either extinct or not to be discussed. I also wanted to be discipled; at Grace I met Ryan, a wise man of God, who discipled me closely for three years. I began to witness miraculous healings, enjoy intimate moments in the Presence of God, and be built up by prophecy. In particular, I received a prophetic word from a visiting prophet that was spot on, as though he knew me and my heart even though he didn't know me from Adam. I could discern that the prophetic word was an encouraging message from God that highlighted details of the destiny God had prepared for me. One of the primary aspects of the prophetic word was the identification of a "teaching mantle" on my life, which served to confirm the call of God to be a dedicated teacher of mathematics.

In this season at Grace, God demonstrated His power as Healer in my life. In 2002 I was diagnosed with a 2 cm discrepancy between my longer left leg and shorter right leg. This began to cause me back pain, so I purchased a foam lift for each of my right shoes. But in 2009, during an evangelistic outreach at CU Boulder, everything

changed. A girl gave a testimony of how God had caused her leg to suddenly grow 1.5 inches two days earlier. In response to her testimony and a pastor's challenge to believe God would heal me, I had fresh faith that God would in fact heal me that night. I sat down, took off my shoes, and extended my legs in front of me. The pastoral staff began to pray in Jesus' Name for my leg to grow, and then I felt my knee stretch! I stood and found that my legs were balanced. God had healed me, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Witnesses told me that they saw my right leg shoot out to match the length of the longer left leg. A week later I visited a doctor who confirmed that my right leg had grown. I had to purchase new shoes to replace the lifted shoes that had become obsolete due to the power of God. Praise the Lord! Since that miraculous day in 2009, I have been passionate about releasing physical healing in Jesus' Name to people with illness and brokenness.

In my years at Grace, I discovered that our greatest strengths can become obstacles to faith if they are not submitted to God. As an individual with a strong mind, it has been a temptation to trust in my own understanding and wisdom instead of trusting God. There are times when wisdom and persuasive speech are insufficient, and we need the supernatural Presence and power of God. Accordingly, as I have humbled myself, including my intellect, before the Lord, He has demonstrated his power to me and through me. One aspect of this was in praying in tongues. I eagerly desired this spiritual gift, but it took three years for me to finally see a breakthrough into receiving that gift. The breakthrough occurred in 2010, and I have practiced this gift ever since as an aspect of my spiritual connection with the Lord.

From childhood through age 27, my deepest inner struggle was with shame due to a corrupted, negative self-image. I found deliverance from this struggle through a four-month group counseling program through Cambridge Vineyard Church in Boston, MA in 2012. It is accurate to conclude that I have experienced the healing work of God both suddenly, in the case of my leg, and gradually, in the case of my restoring a healthy, positive self-image.

Also in 2012 in Boston, I had a three-month, intense relationship which led to engagement. However, my fiancé broke off the engagement after two weeks, leaving me shell-shocked and grieved. This was the most painful chapter of my life to date, but fortunately I was able to walk through it with my supportive and loving church family.

Joining the faculty of Bowdoin College from 2013-2015 was an excellent opportunity to grow as a mathematician and instructor. At the same time, it placed me on the frontlines of a spiritual battlefield. The Bowdoin Christian Fellowship faced persecution that eventually led to it being derecognized by Bowdoin and needing to find an off-campus home base. The administration placed constant pressure on Christian students and faculty to cave to the prevailing cultural orthodoxy of Bowdoin. Homosexuality, in particular, was sacred at Bowdoin. Questioning whether practicing homosexuality was a proper expression of human sexuality was completely taboo. I strongly feel that God strategically placed me at Bowdoin for those two years, and the Lord bore fruit through our ministry even in the midst of towering obstacles.

It is fair to say that the last three years with Gonzaga University in Spokane, WA, with the exception of my semester in Florence, were some of my darkest years, literally and emotionally/spiritually. The winters were harsh and dreary, with limited sun, snow, and potholes galore. I experienced depression in a way that I had never previously

known. I lost sight of the hope of God's goodness with regards to bringing me into a promised land where I could thrive, and providing a wife. I made compromises on God's holy commandments. But, the Lord was faithful, even when I was unfaithful. He brought me to a place of sincere repentance and made a way for me to come to Biola.

In Summer 2019, I was given scripture and words to help lead a friend to salvation in Jesus Christ. Her story has been an incredible reminder of the power of the Gospel to completely transform a life. I have been humbled by her example of "selling everything" to enter into intimacy with our Heavenly Father by the Holy Spirit. I have witnessed her passionately, sincerely, and completely fall in love with her Father, best friend, and constant companion. God is inviting me closer to Him than I realized was possible, and I am hungry beyond all else to walk with God moment by moment. I want to abide in Him, experience the love He has for me, and be His friend. I have an insatiable appetite for more of God Himself, at all costs.

Zooming out, part of my walk with the Lord has been discovering how I can best serve Him and serve people. I have found joy in serving with vacation Bible schools for children in Mexico, evangelistic outreaches, neighborhood rebuilding projects, Christian Graduate Group leadership, children and youth ministry, and grocery distribution and prayers for the homeless and impoverished. I have loved serving within the Christian Fellowship at Bowdoin and the Wesleyan Christian Fellowship through participation in weekly Bible studies and prayer, logistical assistance, and writing for Bowdoin's *Agathos Christian Journal*. I have also delighted in serving as a prayer minister at church, offering prayer and listening to God on behalf of others.

God has been faithful to provide a church that is truly home in each city in which I have lived. In each step of my journey, God has faithfully spoken and confirmed His call to a particular church home where I am able to thrive. I have experienced the blessing of family within the Body of Christ across the United States in the midst of my academic pilgrimage. Primarily, this has been with the Vineyard Movement. My church communities have been seedbeds for transformation, where my faith can be sharpened, my body can be healed, my heart can be set free, and my spiritual gifts can be activated. I have come to trust God to release breakthrough and to speak to me through my brothers and sisters in Christ. I have been given wise Christian men to imitate. From my resident assistants at Westmont to my many pastors, I have been attracted to the godly character of these men and have been transformed as I follow their example of faith.

God has also revealed His will regarding career decisions. There is evidence that the Lord led me to enroll at Westmont, enter graduate school at Colorado State University, conduct research at MIT Lincoln Laboratory, and to take positions at the Air Force Institute of Technology, Bowdoin College, Wesleyan University, Gonzaga University, and now, Biola University. In my career, God has opened doors for me and then highlighted those doors so that I can follow Him into a new adventure in trust and obedience. Although there have been turbulent seasons as well as joyous ones, I am willing to follow wherever He leads, confident that He will be with me, from glory to glory.