

Excerpt from *Why Become a Christian? A Spiritual Memoir*

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Chapter 4

My “Second” Conversion:

Becoming Precedes Behaving-and-Being

My “first” conversion was from a humanistic focus on Self to accept Jesus Christ into my heart as my Lord and Savior. This involved a *saving faith* in accepting who Jesus is and what He did, and gaining eternal salvation with Him in heaven. Below, I summarize previous discussion.

Who Jesus is: He is fully God, with the same attributes as the Father and Holy Spirit; He is the Messiah (Savior, Redeemer) prophesied by over 300 Old Testament Scriptures; He was born as fully man through the Virgin Mary supernaturally through the Holy Spirit without any human sin.

What Jesus did: He taught and lived to do His Father’s Will and please His Father (Jesus was never Self-willed); His Crucifixion on the Cross was a one-time, final atonement for the past/present/future sins of all mankind; His Resurrection from the dead conquered death; after His Ascension back to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to guide Believers who have *saving faith* in Who Jesus is and What He did.

My “second” conversion involved God converting *my* Being, Behaving, Becoming Model into *His* Becoming, Behaving, Being Model so I understand what it means to Become Born Again. During this conversion process I gained a fuller understanding that **Christianity is Christ**, in these ways:

Understanding Why Jesus came: Jesus came to earth for purposes such as these: to complete the Law’s requirement to atone for all sin ¹; to fulfill the Prophets’ prophecies about this Redeemer/Messiah ²; to save, not judge, those who believe in Him ³; to reveal the Father’s loving nature as His sinless Son while living amongst us ⁴; to reveal the Father’s Deity ⁵; to reveal the Truth contained in the Word of God ⁶; to seek and save the lost and set the captives free from whatever enslaves us ⁷; to give more abundant life ⁸; to fulfill the Father’s Will by dying to save/redeem us. ⁹

Understanding When to come to Jesus: Right now is the acceptable time ¹⁰; when Jesus knocks at the door ¹¹; when we lose our way and need a Good Shepherd ¹²; when we have daily needs ¹³; when we are heavy laden and need rest ¹⁴; when we feel alone ¹⁵; when we need peace ¹⁶; when we need to repent and ask for God’s forgiveness ¹⁷; when we are captive to sin ¹⁸; when we come to Holy Communion to commemorate His death ¹⁹; when we want to gain access to the Father, for Jesus is the Way to this. ²⁰

Understanding Where Jesus is: Because Jesus is omnipresent, He is always with each Believer ²¹; in the midst of gathered Believers ²²; in a grateful Believer’s heart when we Him, and especially during inevitable trials and tribulations ²³; when we are walking through the valley of the shadow of fear and need a Good Shepherd to guide and protect us. ²⁴

Understanding How Jesus lived: Jesus proclaimed unmatched moral teachings for disciples to apply ²⁵; lived a life for disciples to imitate ²⁶; made friends with His disciples ²⁷; prayed to Our Father in heaven ²⁸; made new disciples and gave the Great Commission to do

likewise ²⁹; glorified the Father ³⁰; praised the Father ³¹; spoke God's Word to combat Satan's temptations. ³²

This chapter provides a fuller understanding of Becoming Born Again than I had when this occurred because no one explained this to me back then. This fuller understanding gradually resulted while answering these questions:

- **Why Must I Become Born Again? Why Must All Believers?**
- **Why Would Jesus Die for Me? And for You?**
- **Who is the God of the Bible? What are His Unique Attributes?**
- **Why Did God Change My Being, Behaving, Becoming Model into His Becoming, Behaving, Being Model?**

Why Must I Become Born Again? Why Must All Believers?

Jesus gives the answer, to Nicodemus a Jewish religious leader, when He says: "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God... I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life." ³³

Becoming a Born Again Christian is totally different than attempting to Self-develop a list of *human-desired* qualities or characteristics to Be and Behave in ways that enable you to Become **Self-actualizing** or Become **Self-as-god**. For, no one can Be or Behave in any way to merit Becoming Born Again. Instead, God must draw or choose or call us through His Holy Spirit – and we must respond by accepting Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior.

Have you noticed that God often draws or chooses people when their lives are not working or they are "walking in the valley of the shadow of death"? God called me "just as I am" as He did for Josh McDowell and C. S. Lewis, two atheists whose conversions greatly influenced my own. Billy Graham also came to Jesus "just as I am" – as did those millions who "came forward" at one of his many Crusades (attended by over 200 million people around the world). This is why Billy Graham's autobiography is entitled *Just as I Am* (1997; 2012). Just as I am is always "good enough" for God to draw you to saving faith in His Son Jesus.

Have you noticed how difficult it is for people who live in large man-made cities to have

faith in the God of the Bible? They look around at man-made buildings and other constructions and feel Self-sufficient. In comparison, farmers have learned to trust in God's Providence when they sow seed with the hope of reaping a harvest; they know the limitations of Self-sufficiency.

Have you noticed how difficult it is for highly educated individuals to have a saving faith in Jesus Christ? They prefer human reasoning and human wisdom. So, "God in his wisdom saw to it that the world would never know him through human wisdom... So when we preach that

Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense. But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. This foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans.”³⁵

Because of my nine years of higher education (B.A. in Psychology; M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Educational Psychology), I had difficulty accepting that Jesus is the Way – because He is the Truth – therefore He is the Life. (John 14:6 TNIV) Before heeding God's call, I sought knowledge from *man-made* sources (especially from “Self Help” books) instead of seeking wisdom from *God-inspired* sources (especially the Bible). Because my Self-sufficiency would not allow me to Become a Believer, I was missing out on the Truth the Holy Spirit reveals: “It is to us [Believers] that God revealed these things by his Spirit. For his Spirit searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets. No one can know a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit, and no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit. And we have received God's Spirit (not the world's spirit), so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them.”³⁶

Lessons Learned: There was a time when I thought the Word of God (the Bible) was only “just words” that various authors had written, which were assembled into “just another book.” I now know this is not true, because the Bible is the most accurately transmitted book (from the original autograph to transcribed manuscripts to present versions) and is the best preserved book from antiquity, when compared to any other historical book. I know that God must be the Source of this.

I know my bent to pursue higher education led me into the “far country” to embrace the teachings and promises of humanistic psychology: that I could Become Self-actualizing by my own efforts. It took ten years for me to discover that these promises are untrue. Only God's Truth is True.

Spiritual Insights: When humanistic psychology did not deliver what was promised when I was “walking in the valley of the shadow of death” and contemplating suicide as the only solution, God used this situation to draw me to Him. Before I could respond to God's call, I had to understand in my inner-most Being the answer to this question: Why would the Sovereign God of all Creation be interested in me, especially after the Self-centered lifestyle I had studied, professed as a university professor, and lived as a person?

Why Would Jesus Die Just for Me? And Just for You?

Until you answer this question – at the deepest, most personal level – you cannot possibly understand why you would want to Become a Born Again Christian. You cannot possibly understand why God would send His Son Jesus to die just for you and for me, and why Jesus would willingly do this when we've done nothing, and never can do anything, to deserve this **Good News**.

To appreciate this **Good News** at the deepest personal level, listen to these two songs on YouTube: **Why Me, Lord?** was written by Kris Kristofferson to reflect the hard times before accepting Jesus Christ; I like listening to Johnny Cash sing this because his voice reveals his hard journey. **Who Am I** by Casting Crowns also expresses the **Good News** that only Jesus

brings – not because of who I am, but because of *what He did*, not because of what I’ve done, but because of *who He is*.

It is God’s Will for all mankind to be redeemed from our *fallen* state and restored in God’s image or likeness. After being created in God’s image, Adam and Eve ate forbidden fruit, such that their disobedience resulted in a *sinful nature* being passed on to all future humans. This *fallen* condition cannot be redeemed and restored by *sinful* humans unsuccessfully attempting to obey God’s Commandments, but only by *sinless* God in the form of a *sinless* human: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”³⁷

Here is more **Good News**. God loves me “just as I am” and loves you “just as you are” even though we are sinners: “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”³⁸ Having faith in what Jesus did ensures Believers have *eternal salvation* in heaven: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”³⁹

Having such *saving faith in* Jesus includes even more **Good News**: Believers receive **free gifts** they cannot earn by their own efforts or merits:

Believers Become **justified** (made just) in God’s eyes: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”⁴⁰

Believers Become **righteous** (gain right standing with God’s Laws): “Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law.”⁴¹

Believers Become **holy and freed** as captives to sin in God’s eyes: “Christ made us right with God; he made us pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.”⁴² This means Believers can experience *present salvation* in this life, with assurance of *eternal salvation* afterwards.

As you read these Scriptures, do you understand the theological words they contain: justified, made right, holy, freed from sin? If not, keep reading this and the following chapters, where I explain them in plain language.

Lessons Learned: “Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.”⁴³ These historical facts are among hundreds that Josh McDowell cites in *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidences for the Christian Faith*. This is why **Christianity is Christ** – having faith in Jesus, instead of having *beliefs about* Him or engaging in religious practices.

Spiritual Insights: It is truly God’s **Amazing Grace** “that saved a wretch like me” and every other Believer. You can view Wintley Phipps describe the origin of this inspirational hymn on [YouTube](#). While demonstrating how any Negro Spiritual can be played using only the black keys on the piano, Phipps reveals how John Newton got the melody for *Amazing Grace* while listening to this melody rise from the bowels of the slave ship he captained, full of Black people singing below decks. This story is truly amazing because John Newton converted from slave trader to seek abolition of this evil practice after converting to Christianity. Our God truly works in amazing ways!

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Why Did God Convert *My* Being, Behaving, Becoming Model into *His* Becoming, Behaving, Being Model?

When I Became a Born Again Christian, I did not realize *my* original Being, Behaving, Becoming Model was backwards. Not until God converted this into *His* **Becoming, Behaving, Being Model** and replaced my list of *human-desired* qualities and characteristics with *God-provided* free gifts and subsequent transformations so I won't be conformed to this world.

I illustrate *His* BBB Model on Jesus' empty Cross to remind me of His Death and Resurrection. At the top, are *God-provided free gifts* each Believer receives upon having *saving faith* in Jesus (these are described in Chapter 5).



On the crossbeam are *God-inspired transformations* for Believers to make over time, with Holy Spirit assistance. Chapter 6 describes how we “work out our salvation” (not earn it) in order to:

- Become a more mature Christian: “Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be **mature and complete**, not lacking anything.”⁵⁸
- Live life more abundantly: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it more abundantly*.”⁵⁹
- Become more complete: “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to **completion** until the day of Christ Jesus.”⁶⁰

Chapters 7-11 discuss how God desires Believers to make additional transformations so we won’t be conformed to this world. As a proactive and responsible person, I struggle with the saying, “Let go and let God,” because surely He expects me to do something by using the intelligence, motivation, and free will He has given me. So, what does God expect of me and every other Believer? He expects us to “work out our salvation” by aligning inner Being (motives, attitudes, thoughts, values) with outer Behaving (our actions) to make the *God-desired Being-and-Behaving transformations* shown beneath the crossbeam.

The Apostle Peter realized the importance of aligning Being holy and Behaving holy: “Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so *be holy* in all you *do*; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”⁶¹ (emphasis mine)

The Apostle Paul commends the Thessalonians for aligning Behaving-and-Being in three different ways: “We remember before our God and Father your **work produced by faith**, your **labor prompted by love**, and your **endurance inspired by hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶² (emphasis mine)

The Apostle John encourages a Being-and-Behaving alignment to combine love with actions: “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.”⁶³

In *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers provides these insights concerning a Believer’s responsibility to work out your salvation: “You cannot do anything for your salvation, but you must *do* something to manifest it, you must *work out* what God has worked in. Are you working it out with your tongue, and your brain and your nerves? If you are still the same miserable crosspatch, set on your own way, then it is a lie to say that God has saved and sanctified you.” (May 15)

I must emphasize three important points here:

“In someone who has been born again, the source of the will is Almighty God.... With focused attention and great care, you have to *work out* what God *works in* you— not *work* to accomplish or earn your own salvation, but *work it out* so you will exhibit the evidence of a life based with determined, unshakable faith on the complete and perfect redemption of the Lord. As you do this, you do not bring an opposing will up against God’s will— God’s will *is* your will. Your natural choices will be in accordance with God’s will, and living this life will be as natural as breathing.” (Chambers, June 6)

First: Even though I'm not using the triangular BBB Model with Jesus as Lord and Savior inside the heart (illustrated previously), He is still there because of the *saving faith* and *intellectual faith* I have in Him: "In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." ⁶⁴

Second: The *God-inspired* transformations beneath the crossbeam are totally unlike the *human-desired* characteristics advocated by Humanistic Psychology and Transpersonal Psychology, which I discuss in Chapters 12 and 13.

Third: After understanding these *God-provided* / *-desired* / *-inspired* Transformations, I stopped seeking answers to these *Self-focused* **Existential Questions:**

Who am *I*? (Being)

Where am *I* going? (Becoming)

What must *I* do to get there? (Behaving)

Instead, I began seeking answers to these *God-focused* **Eternal Questions:**

Who am I to become to fulfill God's Purpose? (Becoming transformations)

How is God transforming how I behave? (Behaving)

How is God transforming who I am? (Being)

Lessons Learned: The Bible's 1,500-year consistency had to be *God-inspired* from *Genesis* through to *The Book of the Revelation*. From beginning to end, no other book has such consistency.

Spiritual Insights: Jesus is the prophesied Messiah (Savior, Redeemer) who connects the Old and New Testaments: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." ⁶⁵