

Finding Truth

Written By: Cindy Meehan-Patton, August 2006

Like all of you, I have been seeking some sort of meaning and truth to this life, something to help it all make more sense- the chaos, the war, the strife, the struggle and the light in the midst of worldly darkness. The physical and spiritual manifestation of this can only be described as a void that drained back to empty every time I would try to fill it up with something special in this life of mine.

I cannot say that I have found the Truth to this seeking and filling of the void, but I can say that the Truth has found me. And it happened at age 40 in September of 2003 on a mountain bike ride. I was on the road to the Blue Ridge Parkway, much like the Biblical character Paul (Saul in his early life) when he was on the road to Damascus. Instead of "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" I was spoken to with words that were not in my vocabulary and with words that God knew would get my attention because His first statement to me gave me a glimpse of the Truth for all of us.

The day of this encounter with God I had been recovering from being sick for a couple of weeks due to an exposure to mold that waylaid me and took me out, like many weeks in my adult life. I have been challenged with MCS (Multiple Chemical Sensitivity) and mold/fungus allergies for about 15 years. I don't let it rule my life. I have a very productive and successful small business that I have spent 15 years building, a very active lifestyle and a wonderful healthy home that I designed for myself, my husband, Pat, who is also challenged with MCS and our dogs- Annie and CoCo.

I was fed up with being sick. That is the redhead in me- impatient and passionate about doing and being someone in this life. I have very little tolerance for being sick eventhough I seem to spend much of my life this way! So off I went on my bike, determined to make it up the 4 mile climb to the Parkway regardless of whether I keeled over or felt great. On the road, I started feeling dizzy and shaky. So half heartedly (half is always better than not at all) I said, "God am I going to make it up this mountain?" And guess what. He answered me!

You are probably thinking "oh yeah right- how can she say it was God?" Well, believe me- when God speaks, there is no mistaking Him. Everything was suddenly quiet around me except for His voice in my mind. His first words to me were: "Yes, you will make it up this mountain, but it is not your salvation." OK- anyone who knew me then, knows that "salvation" was not a word in my vocabulary. He knew just what to say to get my attention right away. This should be no surprise right? He is God afterall.

I looked around while riding and asked, "Is that you God?" Well, we just kept on talking for about 40 minutes up the mountain. He replied: "Yes, it is I and I have been trying to get your attention for a long time." Unbelievable, yes? God made it completely and utterly believable for me. Without a doubt, I know it was God speaking to me. With this faith, which is a gift from God- my life began transforming from that day forward.

There is a prelude to this scene with God, so let me back up the truck a minute. If you are in a hurry, come back to this part. If you are not in a hurry, grab something to drink and settle in. I found myself editing this writing about 10 times to cut out all that I did not think necessary, but it is still long!

Like most people I know, including my father, growing up was hard. I was born in 1963 and grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio. I was diagnosed with an ulcer at age 10. I lived on antacids and suppositories, trying to calm the nausea that had taken over my life. I obviously could not digest what was going on. In the late 1980's I began having a lot of health problems that seemed to result from toxic air quality (outdoor and indoor). I moved from place to place, searching for a safe haven in which to rest. I seemed to have allergic responses to food, mold and chemicals-which covers about everything!

I was not familiar with the diagnosis known as MCS (Multiple Chemical Sensitivities) or EI (Environmental Illness) prior to my experience, so I thought I was going crazy and so did everyone else who cared about me. By the early 90's I was in my 20's and living in desperation, and it was not a quiet desperation by any means. I have never been known to be a quiet person. I wear my feelings on my sleeve so to speak. I scared and upset a lot of people who cared for me.

My mom, who I called and still call one of my guardian angels, saved my butt so many times during this time in my life. After I had a nervous breakdown of sorts, she told me to do some research and find a place where I could go to find peace for my life. She ended up putting me on a plane (which was quite a challenge for a person who suffers from MCS due to the toxic air quality in airplanes) to California where I stayed in a Hindu retreat for 3 weeks.

I slept in a cabin surrounded by many deer, meditated 3 times per day, ate vegetarian food and rested a lot. But what I walked away with and entered back into -was the residual conflict I had with the world. The impending sense of doom was still looming, the void continued to drain to empty. I tried to handle my emotions and problems through meditation and mantras, but the confusion, chaos and unanswered questions about life were still there. In some ways they created greater conflict than ever

because instead of living in these feelings and fears all the time, the meditations and mantras would give me a temporary peace with the conflicts about life always returning full force. At the *core* level of my life, nothing had changed.

At the crux of my health challenges in 1990-91, I was in a very unstable relationship of 9 years, I could not find a safe place to live and I could not work anywhere because most offices made me ill. I slept in my truck and tents and stayed with friends that had safe environments for months at a time. I tried living in several different houses and apartments, all making me ill. I was basically homeless. Not surprising that I did not want to live. OK, I promise the story gets better!!

God was lifting me up in the midst of this living nightmare by gifting me with some very loving Christian friends, Susan and Mel. I remember literally running into the arms of their home just trying to get a moment's peace, a moment that was not filled with rage, confusion and despair. I did not believe like they did. As a matter of fact, I tried to read the Bible with Susan and it just did not make sense to me- instead it left me with so many questions. She even tried taking me to a few of her Bible study classes, which I do not remember. But I knew that whatever Susan and Mel had, I needed and wanted desperately, it was a matter of life or death for me. Susan was always there for me. She was my listening ear. She worried with me and about me. She loved me. Mel always welcomed me with his warm happiness, accepting of my craziness. They were genuinely loving people.

In 1991, Susan reminds me that one night in my desperation I prayed to receive Jesus as my Savior with her. I do not remember. My heart was so fragmented at that time that there was no way to grasp at Jesus. I was too busy wanting to find a way out of this life rather than wanting to stay. Darkness engulfed my soul, but the seed was planted that night. It just needed lots of watering. Over the next 12 years, Susan and Mel remained long distance friends as they moved around. I saw less and less of them while my life continued to be a teeter-totter of up's and down's, chaos and illness, resulting in despair.

Well, God dipped His hand in my life again (and in the life of my boyfriend, Pat) when He reminded Pat that he was about to lose the love of his life that he was seeking, me. It sounds sappy, but it was really quite spiritual for Pat- kind of like a 2 x 4 hitting you on the head in order to wake you up. So, Pat finally (after 9 years) asked me to marry him. I actually laughed when he proposed because I did not believe him. But I called him the next morning and asked if we could have breakfast and talk about it. (After being in a very dysfunctional, addictive relationship that was on and off again probably 100 times, you can probably understand my questioning.)

Our marriage completely changed our relationship. It did a 180 so to speak which was stressful for the first 4 years. Trust had to be rebuilt and we were both seeking deeply for God or whomever it was that was out there supposedly in control of this chaotic world we lived in. We delved into just about every religion or spiritual path imaginable, coming up with yet an emptied, drained void in the end. Little did we know that it was really God who was trying to get our attention and intervening in our lives. If you look back on your life, I am sure you can see where He has dipped His mighty hand in your life- pulling you out of the mire.

In July of 2003, Susan and Mel came to visit, yippee! We loved being with our buddies eventhough they were Jesus freaks. We had not seen them in quite some time but every time we got together it seemed as if we just saw them yesterday. One day we decided to go for a walk around downtown Asheville. During the walk, I felt so wiped out and sick that I had to go home. It is always stressful to be sick when friends are around, feeling like an imposition to their good time. But Susan simply put her arm around me and said, "come on, I will go home with you sweetie." On the way home she started sharing some deep stuff about her faith with me. She talked about wounds of the heart and mind and how they can really fragment and shatter a person, leaving them confused and sick. I could relate to this.

When we got home, we were sitting on our deck with the sun shining down on us. Susan saw the pain I was in, took my hands and prayed for and over me. Her prayer actually lifted my illness that evening. I was able to eat, drink and be merry with my friends. What a miracle that was to me! Strike another one up to God because that night is when my heart cracked open just enough to see that there was something much bigger than me out there, and it was good, it was a Savior.

Two weeks later, after being struck with illness again, was when the encounter with God on the mountain bike occurred. Needless to say, when He started speaking I forgot all about being sick. I felt protected and so alive. And then when I got to the top, our conversation closed and I flew back down the mountain sobbing with joy at the honor I had just received. One of the things God said to me that will never leave me was: "You have looked many places for the Truth but I am telling you now that your only connection to the Truth is found through and in Me." Wow! That could be enough wisdom for my lifetime, but there was more, much more.

It was as if God knew exactly what I needed to hear so that my void could be filled. He added: "You worry way too much about what other people think and do. You will only find your answers through Me. Stop looking to "others" for the Truth." He went on to say: "You have to know that many people will not come to Me and know the Truth, but that gets to be OK for you." Gosh, He just zeroed in on that heartbreak. He knew it would come. Are you melting yet? You can imagine how I felt, so loved. Loved that is unmatched by any person that is in my life. Love that is beyond explanation. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only

begotten Son (Jesus) so that we may live. I pray that you to embrace this Truth. It is really all we have in this life, if we really want to live.

So I asked God, "Does this mean I need to read the Bible for answers?" He replied: "Yes, the Bible is my Word, and I also want you in relationship with others who know me and I want you to come to Me, to talk to Me as well, stay in communication with Me always." I said: "But God I have tried reading the Bible and it does not make sense to me." He said, "Read it now and it will." So needless to say, I raced home and opened the Bible Susan and Mel had given me back in 1992 and sure enough, there was something there- a relationship and a desire I did not have before that day. So here I am, 3 years later, writing this to you. I have learned a lot in these 3 years of reading His Words.....

First of all, you must believe in God, as the Creator of all things in heaven and earth. If you don't, I feel sorry for you because you are being very deceived my friend. The universe is way beyond science as we have all seen. So give it up. He is real and you are alive because of Him. Along with believing in God, the only way that the Christian path makes any sense is to believe that the Bible is true and is Truth, the Truth to live our lives by. From my experience, the Bible will not make sense until you believe in your heart and mind that Jesus Christ ransomed His life for you and gives you real life as you ask Him to reside in you. Asking Him for forgiveness- for not knowing him but instead living in and through the deceptions of the world. This is done as an act of faith for many who do not have encounters like I had with God. I am simply telling you the story of how God worked through me. He will work through you in an entirely different way I am sure! He is the only One who really knows you and what you need.

Second, you must know in your heart and mind that we (humanity) are his creation, his chosen, his children. We were created before the foundations of the earth to be His prized possession- to carry His Truth to the far ends of the earth! This is Truth that should lighten your load of heavy burdens. He created you, my dear friend, as one of His chosen. However, he gave us choice to either come back in our lives- to Him and live with Him and for Him (instead of living in the arms of the enemy); or we choose otherwise. He created us to live a life that returns us to Him.

Third, you must realize and live knowing that the world around you feeds you false- half truths telling you that in essence – you are god and to take care of #1- you! But God is so much bigger than that and when you know Him intimately, when Jesus resides in your heart- you will see with your own eyes that God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him*(not ourselves!). Glory to God, this is so revealing! It is so unlike any religion in the world, which always bring the focus back to the self and inner peace. I am not saying that peace is bad, it is needed in all of us. But the way to peace is very different than the world portrays it. The world is our battlefield. Discernment is essential. We must fight to keep the Truth in our hearts.

Knowing and being a human being in this world, created by God— is a journey that is packed full of difficulties, twists and turns and major amounts of deception waiting, lurking to draw us away from the Truth found in God's Words for us. Jesus was the only way God could get this message to us. Jesus became God *and man* in order to show us how to live; he came to our level. Then He sacrificed Himself so that we could live. If Jesus did not lower Himself to the crucifixion on the cross, we would not be here. He ransomed His life for yours, for mine.

So why are we not all just chomping at the bit to find this information, this Way of life? This brings me to the fourth big thing I have learned. While God is calling us back to Him, there is an enemy against and in our souls. This dark spirit is so set against you knowing this Truth and giving your life back to God- that he will do anything, and I do mean anything, to take you out- to keep your heart hard and to destroy you. Don't let him win. God has given us the choice to either ask Him into our lives and mean it, or allow the enemy to rule our hearts. It is a black and white decision to be made- there is no gray area.

The Savior of our hearts is Jesus Christ. He is the one and only LIVING God. He is our only way to the Father of all, God. All other gods that you may know are dead or false. He is alive, He is so real, He is God and man. When we allow Him to reside in our hearts, He restores the Truth to our hearts and we really see it for the first time. He awaits your invitation but Jesus is the perfect gentleman. He will not intrude upon your choice.

My experience with salvation is that it is not a mind thing, it is a heart thing. The mind is where we first hear it and choose to accept it. But until we crack our hardened and hurt hearts open to really hear Him, salvation could remain shallow and unknown. The heart is also the only way to grasp His Words to us, the Bible. Without knowing Him intimately, the meaning will be shallow and without His Spirit. It is no wonder God gave us words like: "Guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." He was not kidding. Without our hearts ripped open to Him, we are not fully alive. And that is where you will find Him knocking.

So how has Jesus changed my life so radically you may wonder? The absolute despair I felt for the world and humanity most of my young and adult life no longer owns me. Notice I did not say that the world was a better place. But I learned why it will never be a better place and why man is at war with each other and with other countries. Many of my questions about the world have been answered. I learned that we will never see peace in the world in this lifetime, especially in the Middle East. I have learned that the very war we are in today is a prophetic, spiritual battle- literally. I know you are probably turned off by scripture

if you do not know and read the Bible, but I think you will find this passage from Jesus quite interesting in terms of the Middle East:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, "*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*"
Luke 13:34-35

I know you may find this hard to believe, but do yourself a favor and turn away from judgement of what I am saying until you read the Bible for yourself. It is all in there. From the beginning, God gave us choice. From the moment He began His creation to the first man, followed by brother against brother, mankind has, by choice, created division. This is the Truth. The Truth shall set you free, free from the burdens of trying to fix the world. This is God's job. Lay your burden down to Him. So what are you waiting for? Don't tell me that deep down you are not seeking this freedom. I know you are.

There is a light at the end of the wars. God is the creator of all things and He will prevail over evil in the end. Until then, He allows the battle because people have chosen it. Hey, I am not making this up- this is not coming from my memory, but from God's Words. So don't get mad at me. I am just the messenger.

The other grief I carried so heavily, weighing my spirit down was the damage we do to our environment. I am an environmentalist- that has not changed. But there is a difference between my old life before Christ and my new life with Christ and the way I see the damage. I think all Christians should be environmentalists and to many are not. We know first hand from God's Truth that He gave us dominion over the earth and all things in it. What I see happening is that instead of taking care of our earth and it's beauty, we abuse it. Because of humanities tendency to do harm rather than good -ever since we made the choice to live for the world rather than God- we knowingly and unknowingly dominate the natural world rather than take care of it. This is blasphemy to God, after all He is the Creator and we are talking about His creation here.

There is so much damage that has been done as a result of chemical and petroleum dependence that I could create a book just listing them. Besides, there are plenty of films and books out now on this subject. Personally, I did not know I could love the natural world more than I already did until the Truth found me. When I am in my gardens or riding my bike or sitting on my decks, I just revel in God's beauty. I have newborn eyes for His awesome creation; His gift for us- and it takes my breath away. Part of the lie that I used to believe was that the earth was my Savior, I worshiped it. I looked to it for my nurturing. This sucked me into the weightiness of the destruction we create. Now, I revel in His beauty, and know that He is in control and that He can and will restore us and the rest of His creation in the end. Does this mean that we are off the hook and can continue abusing the natural / animal part of the world? No, absolutely not. If anything, this should make us more dedicated to the health and stewardship of His creation. There are consequences to the wrong choices we make. He is a just God. And why shouldn't He be? Afterall, we would not be here, have the air we breathe, the ground we walk on or the water we drink without the grace and mercy of God!

Historically, the Bible was the first written word for people to follow. There is a reason for this, God created it, He breathed it. It is our book of Life and He has given it to us so that we might live life abundantly. I am not speaking of living for the world, but for God. The world is finite, God is infinite. When we choose life with Him, it is eternal life, the opposite of the worldly life.

So why so much pain and suffering? First of all, God never said this life would be easy. As a matter of fact, He wants us to be challenged. Difficulties can humble us and God is looking for this humility. If you decide to read the Bible, you will see that Jesus was and is the most humble man you will ever know. Our weaknesses are what God uses to make us strong. His strength is built in us as we believe in Him over time. This is known as sanctification. Only He can do this for us. We cannot do it ourselves. Sanctification is truly a supernatural gift from God. Cool, huh?

As a matter of fact, He does not want us struggling or striving to be more than we are. He simply wants our damaged hearts so that He can mold them and purify them. God is not a God of performance, rather He is a God of grace and mercy- and He simply awaits your choice. Ask Jesus into your heart. Tell Him of your pain and confess your inability to love Him and others in the past. Confess your wrong-doings. He will forgive you, believe me, I know. I also know it is hard to believe. No mistake is too much for God to handle.

There is gain in the pain. I have been cycling since 1983, road biking for 8 years and mountain biking for 15. I love to sweat and get my heart rate up so high, my mind is cleared of all cobwebs the world tries to put in place. Usually, the more I work my body, the more pain I feel, the clearer I get and the better I feel. Kind of sick, huh? When I raced road bikes, I would get so high from the ride that I would forget time and space. It was better than any drug could ever attempt to be. Not surprising, riding became addictive for me.

Us emotionally intense folks- we love hard and hurt hard and there is no in between. Addiction is easy for us because we often think in extremes. Well, I gained from this pain too, because now I just thoroughly enjoy riding; I no longer feel that I have to do it to stay healthy and I also do not feel any desire to compete. God healed this wound as I took it to Him. He is so personal. He cares about every detail! He can do this for each of us as we bring it to Him.

Suffering can bring us to our knees. Biblically, almost every story contains painful consequences to the way mankind carries on in life. Pain and suffering lift the veil to the worldly view on life pretty quickly, humbling us, making us question our realities. God wants this. Look at your sufferings and there God will be. You see, He promised He would be with us, by us and in us- as we believe in Him and follow His ways. But He never said that this life would be easy. He wants us to be challenged. This is often when we come running to Him.

The spirit of the world and of this age calls us to hurry up, get busy, try harder, do more, be more, be better. But God's Words are so much more peaceful than this. He can remove this urge to perform and be better. There is no gain in this pain. I have prayed and asked that this belief system be changed in me. And in His own magnificent way, He is changing my desires, because He is the one who has written them upon my heart. Magnificent God!

Performance and striving are heavy burdens that many of us bear. When we choose to lay it down, His love can then surround. This is the major theme, love. I do not know anyone who would *not* like to have such burdens lifted. Your burdens are going to be different than mine. But God knows them. As we lay them before Him, He gives us a peace that surpasses all understanding, truly.

I pray that you read this and feel it in your body mind and soul my brothers and sisters. God is all we have in this world, and He has given us this world as a gift, but He is much bigger than the world. He is the Creator of the Universe and everything in it. Invite Him in, listen, confess, pray for forgiveness and then trust, believe and follow Him. He will take you where you have never been. Thanks for taking the time to read this long paper. May God bless you and keep you. May His light shine upon you.

The following is a list of some of my favorite impassioned Christian writers. I hope they light your fire for the Lord as much as they have mine:

-John Eldredge- www.ransomedheart.com John Eldredge has many awesome books available in audio and book form. John's writings are especially good for the seeker and for the uninspired Christian.

-*John Piper- www.desiringgodministries.com John Piper is absolutely passionate and on fire in His faith, he is a must read for anyone desiring passion in their lives.

-Catherine Marshall, Something More, In Search of A Deeper Faith. This is one of the best books I have read about a person's walk with God. It is out of print, so you will need to find it on Amazon.com in the used section. Copyright is 1974.

-Donald Miller, Blue Like Jazz, Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality. You will want to read this book more than once. It gives a very true depiction of the Christian life.

-Steve Brown, A Scandalous Freedom, The Radical Nature of the Gospel. Steve has his own style of writing that can be pretty radical, but well stated.

-Brian D. McLaren, The Secret Message of Jesus, Uncovering the Truth that could Change Everything. Gosh, the title says it all. The book takes you deeply into world issues that could use a radical faith and true understanding of Jesus.

-Eugene Peterson, The Message -is a very story like interpretation of the Bible.