



My Testimony of Salvation

by Gene Easley

I think we all want to tell our story, and I think we should. If God has done something for us, we need to tell others. In the next few pages, I attempt to share some of my story of how the Lord brought me to an experience of salvation.

A Student at Ole Miss

I was saved on February 18, 1962 at the Assembly of God Church in Osceola, Arkansas. I was nineteen years old and a student at Arkansas State College in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Upon graduating from high school, I entered the University of Mississippi in September of 1961. I would only be there for one semester before transferring to Arkansas State. I was happy at the University of Mississippi or Ole Miss, as it is called. The campus was nice, I had made some friends, and the nearby town of Oxford was pleasant. I enjoyed the whole setup. But God had other plans for my life!

I had made a promise to one of my uncles, Dick Easley, who, after his conversion, had become a Baptist preacher. I knew him before he was saved, and even though he was always a very likable person and was always extra good to all the kids, his lifestyle was far from being Christian. But while on vacation to visit Dick and other members of my dad's family, I was amazed to see a total change in my uncle. He no longer did the things he used to do. Now, he just wanted to talk about the Lord. He and his wife, Geraldine, sang Gospel songs as I rode with them in their car. Their lives centered around Christ.

One night I sat and listened to Uncle Dick witness to my dad about what God had done in his life. My heart burned within me as he shared the Gospel of Christ. Tears were in his eyes as he encouraged Dad to give his heart and life to Christ. I wanted what he had.

A day or two later, when I was alone with him, Dick encouraged me to start attending church when we returned home and made me promise to do so. He said, "If no one else in your family goes, you go. Will you promise me you will do that?" I said, "Yes," but in my heart I knew I wouldn't. But I did make a promise to myself that as soon as I left home and got out on my own, I would start to church and serve God.

After I had been at Ole Miss for a few weeks, I remembered that promise. I began to talk with my roommate, Charlie, about going to church. Charlie had been raised a Methodist before entering college and had been a good church goer. He decided he needed to get back in church. So we got ready Sunday morning and attended a local Methodist church. They put us in a Sunday school class off to one side of the sanctuary for college students. We didn't really study the Bible, but rather just discussed different subjects that they felt would relate to us. I remember looking into the sanctuary and seeing a man standing before a small class with an open Bible in his hand. I thought to myself, "That's where I would like to be," because I felt a drawing to learn the Bible.

After Sunday school, I wanted to stay for the main service, but Charlie did not want to stay. Being afraid to attend by myself, fearful I would not know what to do or what would be expected of me, I went back to the campus with Charlie. On the way back, I felt a heavy sense of conviction upon me, as if God was telling me to go back to the service. God would require more of me than partial service. Knowing I should obey His voice, but being too weak, I continued toward the campus, feeling about as miserable as one could feel.

A week or two later, Charlie and I again attended Sunday school at the same church. Again, after our class was over, we returned to our dorms. And, again, I felt that strong sense of conviction fall upon me. It was as if I was saying, "No," to God, and He was saying I could not serve Him without putting my whole self into it. I didn't go to church again that semester. I became caught up in other things, so that attending church didn't seem as urgent or necessary as before.

Is there a God?

Then, a question began to bother me. I realized it was one of the biggest questions that I would ever have to answer. The question was, "Is there really a God?" I didn't necessarily want to deal with it,

but I knew it had to be answered. I knew that if there was a God, I needed to serve and obey Him. And if there wasn't a God, then I needed to forget about that religious stuff and chart my own course.

I decided I had to find out if God was real. I really didn't know how to do it, but I thought, in my own feeble way, I could reason it all out and come to a satisfactory answer. This, of course, is not the way to find God, but I didn't know any better. I began a reasoning process I felt would bring me to some sound conclusions. I considered how creation bears witness to design and evidence of a plan. The food we eat from the field supplies our body with exactly what it needs to support life. The orbiting of the planets reveals design and purpose. I considered many things of this nature concerning creation and came to the conclusion that there has to be a God. There had to be a Creator of the universe. It couldn't all just have happened.

I came to the conclusion there must be a God, but I realized there was still something missing. I could not say with one-hundred percent certainty that there was a God, because I could not see Him or hear Him or touch Him. I concluded that this is all that anyone can do. They just reason it out, and no one knows for sure. Little did I know that in just a few months God would erase that thinking totally from my mind, because I would know without any doubt that God was real. And I would know that there are many others who also know Him in a personal way.

Transferring to Arkansas State

One day toward the end of October, a thought suddenly came into my mind. I did not know where it came from. Now, I have no doubt that it was the Lord putting it there. The thought of transferring from Ole Miss to Arkansas State College (now Arkansas State University) dropped into my mind. My first thought was that that was a ridiculous thing to consider. I had been offered a four-year academic scholarship to Arkansas State before I chose the University of Mississippi. I had turned it down because that college just didn't seem to be the place for me. I instantly rejected the idea of a transfer, while wondering how such a thought could enter my mind.

Later, the thought returned that I should transfer to Arkansas State. Over the next few days, the thought continued to come, and I began to give it consideration. I mentioned to my roommate Charlie that I was considering this. He then related to me that he, also, was considering transferring to another college—one that was near his home town. For several days, we both talked about the possibility of making transfers. It was very difficult, because it seemed like too big a decision to make.

One day, I decided the transfer was the thing to do. I didn't understand the reason why, but now I just felt good about it. I went to my roommate and told him my decision: "I'm going to go to Arkansas State next semester." I suddenly felt like a burden had been lifted. I walked around the campus the rest of that day feeling so happy I wanted to sing. I found myself whistling a tune as I went from place to place. I didn't understand it then, but now I understand that it was God reaching down to me, bringing me to Himself.

I began preparations, writing Arkansas State, requesting permission to enter the second semester, and letting the Ole Miss officials know of my decision. All seemed to be moving so fast. Before the Christmas break, I had received my acceptance from Arkansas, and the transfer was finalized.

On Christmas break I went to see one of my friends, James Furr, who had been in my graduation class at Osceola High. He had entered Arkansas State during the first semester. He was working during Christmas break at a local clothing store. When I went in the store and told him of my decision to transfer, his reaction was, "Oh, good. My roommate is going to change to another dormitory at the beginning of the second semester. If you like, we could be roommates." Of course, I gladly accepted. It was good to be able to room with someone I had known for years. But there was something that I didn't know at that time. James had accepted Christ during that first semester, and his life had totally changed.

When I arrived at Arkansas State in January, the semester had already begun, and I had to register a few days late. While registering, I was asked which dorm I would like to live in. I gave them the dormitory name and room number of my friend's room. The lady checked to see if the room was available. Then she said, "Well, there is a vacancy there. One of the students who was in that room just moved out this morning." I moved in, and, without doubt, was able to see the hand of God working in my life.

The Experience of Salvation

The first couple of days there, I didn't get to talk much with James. I saw him a time or two as we were going to class. But as soon as classes were over, he drove back to Osceola to attend special services in his church. This sounded strange to me. Why would anyone drive fifty miles each afternoon and then have to drive back to the dorm late at night? He did this night after night. By Wednesday of that first

week, we were both in the room for a while at the same time, and James began to explain the change in his life.

He told me that during the first semester of college God had saved him and had changed him. At first when he told me that God had saved him, I started to laugh. I was totally unfamiliar with that terminology. I did not know what saved meant. James had always been someone with a real sense of humor, and I thought he was attempting to say something funny. But from his tone, I could tell he was serious. So, I tried to listen and comprehend his words. In reality, the only thing that made sense was that God had done something wonderful in his life, and things were different now.

That Friday afternoon, when James went home for the weekend, he offered me a ride. Since I didn't have a car, I accepted. When he dropped me off at my house, he invited me to church Sunday morning. I quickly declined with the excuse that I didn't have anything to wear. He just as quickly said, "Just wear what you have on. That will be fine." So, I said okay. I really wanted to go, but through all that had transpired in the last few months, I had virtually forgotten my promise to myself to start attending church.

Sunday morning came and James was there to pick me up. I went both Sunday morning and Sunday night. James returned to Jonesboro right after the Sunday night service, so I had to attend the Sunday night service to catch my ride back to campus. I quickly grew to love that church. I felt a love there that I had not known before. Although the congregation was small, they had a touch of God, and I soaked in everything. I attended faithfully each Sunday morning and night. On the third Sunday after the evening service, the pastor gave an altar call. I didn't even know what an altar call was. I was sitting beside James and he asked me, "Gene, would you like to go down to the altar and pray?" I had watched the people praying at the altars and had been impressed by it. I thought it was great that they were not ashamed to let others see them bow down before God in public and pray. So, I gladly said, "Yes," to James' invitation.

When I knelt down at the altar, James put his hand upon my shoulder and began to pray a simple prayer, "God, save him." I still didn't understand what the term, "saved," meant. I found myself wishing there was some way I could just slip out of that church without anyone seeing me. But I knew that was impossible, and I really didn't want to embarrass my friend. So, I just stayed there on my knees.

Others in the church thought I had come down to be saved, so they began to stand behind me and pray, "God save him." I was there kneeling at the altar with my head down. I looked up and saw an elderly lady of the church seated across from me, looking straight at me, and praying such a sincere prayer, "God save him." I knew then this thing was serious. My attitude by then was that if what they are talking about is something I need, then I want it. I want everything God has for me.

But I still didn't understand what it meant to be saved, until God began to speak to me. I suddenly felt that I was on the outside looking in, and all the people in that church were on the inside. They all had communion with God and I was on the outside. I felt spiritually alienated from God. I felt like I was lost. Suddenly, it came to me! That is what they are saying! I am lost, and I need to be saved! When that revelation hit me, I began to pray, "God save me!" As I prayed, I realized that I was lost and that my soul was destined to an eternity in hell. As this became more real to me, I prayed with more intensity. I actually felt that if I didn't get saved then, that I would slip into an eternal hell. Suddenly, the joy of God flooded my soul, and I knew I was saved. There was no doubt in my mind. I knew the work was done. I knew I was saved!

The first thing I wanted to do after the assurance came into my heart was to stand up, lift my hands, and say, "Hallelujah!" I had watched the people in that church on various occasions without anyone to prompt them lift their hands and say, "Praise the Lord," or, "Hallelujah." I couldn't understand why they were doing this. But as salvation came to my soul, I thought to myself, "I understand now why they do that." I understood why they wanted to praise the Lord. One can't get real salvation without wanting to tell somebody else and without wanting to praise God for it. So, I did it. I stood up and lifted my hands for the first time in my life and said, "Hallelujah," and, "Praise the Lord!" Though I felt strange about what others might be thinking, I didn't care. I was thankful for what God had done.

Today, I am so thankful there was someone who witnessed to me about Christ, invited me to church, invited me to an altar of prayer, and stayed there and prayed for me until God did a work of salvation in my heart. Salvation is real, and we can know we are saved. Jesus said that He came to seek and to save that which was lost.

Thank God, after all of these years since that Sunday in February in 1962, I still know I am saved. I am glad He found me! Thank God, He is still leading people to an experience of forgiveness of sins and a new life in Christ! We don't have to understand all of the theology; we just have to come to Him!