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Frances Kilcrease,

TESTIMONY OF MY SALVATION, By: Frances Kilcrease, member of Promise Land Missionary Baptist Church, Hamburg, AR.

The greatest day of my life was the day that I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. A wonderful feeling of being forgiven of my sin and being at peace with God brought a peaceful feeling into my heart that has never left. After seventy years the feeling is just as fresh today as it was the day that I was saved, and the memory of that day is still fresh.

I was twelve years old and going into the seventh grade. I had not gone to church regularly during my childhood but I knew that I should have been going without being told.

My family lived on a farm, about a mile from the Promise Land Missionary Baptist Church. Everyone living in our rural community were farmers like us. It was during the horse and wagon days. No farmer had a tractor but plowed with horses and mules. A few families owned cars or trucks. They worked hard planting and cultivating their crops until August when the crops were "laid by". During that time of the summer they did not have to plow or hoe in the fields therefore the men could relax for a few weeks until harvest.

During the summer months Mother could walk a mile down a dirt road with us children to church. The road went through a creek bottom that was wet and muddy during the winter months, because we had to walk, we did not go regular. Mother had no encouragement from my father. He could have carried us to church in a horse drawn wagon like my friend's fathers did but it seemed to me that he believed that taking us children to church was unimportant. In the summer time he used the excuse the horses had plowed in the fields all week and that they needed a day of rest. In the wintertime he gave no excuse, just didn't go. Although, just before he died, after I was grown, he said that he wished it had been the law that a father had to send his children to Sunday School. Then it was too late to be an example for me.

Even though I missed spiritual training from my father during my formative years, in other areas, he taught me well. He trained me to be honest, live a clean moral life and work for a living for which I am grateful. Mother tried hard to give me spiritual training. She taught me Bible Stories and would quote Scriptures to correct me. I had rather been spanked than for Mother to quote the Ten Commandments when I needed corrected. Her words still ring in my mind, "The Bible says...". Often I would reply, "Don't say that!"

Today I can look back and see God was at work in my heart when I was in the third grade. I realize now that my teacher was a Christian. I cannot remember her name but I can remember that she taught the entire class to memorize John 3:16, a scripture that

has helped me all the rest of my life. Each morning before we started our classes we recited that scripture for the entire school year. Also, each Monday morning she asked the class to raise our hands if we had gone to Sunday School the day before. I remember one Monday when she asked the question, even though I had not been to Sunday School, I raised my hand, because I knew that I should have. A boy in my class, that was in Sunday School in our church, spoke out that I was not there. My lie was exposed but the teacher did not say one word. But God did! The Holy Spirit began to convict me of sin. I remembered my Mother quoting "Thou shall not lie." I had lied and had broken the commandment! The Holy Spirit convicted me then but I did not know it was He who was making me feel so badly. I believed that the bad feeling was because I got caught. I disliked the boy that told on me. I was afraid that he would tell Mother or Father that I had told a lie in school and I would be punished. The Holy Spirit did not let me forget that I had lied. It was embedded in my mind and still is even to this day. Also by the teacher asking the class if we had gone to Sunday School gave me the feeling that I should have gone and the Holy Spirit began to convict me that it was wrong not to go to church.

Mr. William Stell's family lived near my family's farm. Each Sunday morning I would see his wagon coming down the road in front of our house. He was taking his children to church and Sunday School. I felt convicted by the sight of that wagon going by, so much so, that I would hide until the wagon passed so that Mr. Stell could not see me. I believed that if Mr. Stell did not see me that I would not feel so badly about not going to church. My father helped me a little by having said that his horses needed rest on Sunday. But the guilty feeling did not leave.

One day my sister and I were walking past a neighbor's apple orchard. The trees were loaded with ripe apples. The apples looked so good and I was hungry. We looked to see if anyone could see us then I climbed the fence into the orchard and stole an apple. We called it "swiping" so as to make us feel a little better. The neighbor nor my parents never knew that I had stolen the apple, but the Holy Spirit did. He convicted me with my mother's teachings "Thou shall not steal." My sins began to build up.

As I look back I am led to believe that my mother never realized just how much ammunition that she was giving the Holy Spirit to convict me with by quoting the Ten Commandments. Another commandment stands out in my mind when I was about eleven years old that brought me to my knees. My sister and I were fussing and fighting. Mother was talking in a very sweet voice pleading with us to love each other like the Bible taught and not to fight. I was so mad that I kept chasing my sister through the kitchen where Mother was working. She began to cry and said, "The Bible says, Honor your father and mother and you children are not doing that." She knelt down beside a chair and began to pray aloud for us. The Commandment and her prayer stopped me in my tracks. I knelt beside Mother and put my arm around her. When she stopped praying, she put her arms around me and hugged me up close. I would have gladly taken a spanking and would have felt much better if she had. No relief came! She did not spank me but the Holy Spirit did. That commandment was the crushing blow. Her words kept ringing in my mind. The Bible says, "Honor thou father and

mother, and you children are not doing that." If Mother had spanked me I could have passed it off as soon as I quit hurting physically but the Holy Spirit would not let me forget the Scriptures that she quoted. I felt so mean and ugly but I did not know that the bad feeling was the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.

I sought relief by reading the Bible. My mother and father both read the Bible so I believed if I read the Bible that the mean feeling would go away. Mother's Bible was a copy of the New Testament. I started reading in Matthew and read through John. No help came. All I remember about that reading session was that I was surprised that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John was the same story about Jesus and that Matthew had a lot of "begots". I had read a lot of books and thought that all books had a different story.

The week following the first Sunday in August every year when the crops were "laid by" Promise Land Church had a week revival services both morning and night. We always went to the revival even though we walked. Mother made the walk fun. During the day we played a game of seeing how many different trees that we could name. At night she pointed out the different stars, constellations and the Milky Way arching across the sky that God had made. The doctrine that God created everything was so embedded in my mind that no teacher could shake my belief with the teaching of evolution.

The annual revival in August 1934 was the turning point in my life. Bro. A. T. Powers was the pastor of Promise Land Missionary Baptist Church. He was a giant of a man but very kind. I cannot remember the visiting evangelist's name but I do remember what he preached. He taught that God loved people so much that he sent Jesus to be crucified and that all people are sinners in God's sight. That week I understood that Jesus Christ died for me, and that I could be forgiven of my sins and be saved by accepting Jesus Christ as my Savior, then after being saved I needed to follow the Lord by first being baptized then join the church.

All week I thought about what he was preaching but did not tell anyone, there was no doubt in my mind that I was a sinner. The Ten Commandments that Mother quoted had taught me that I was. The Holy Spirit convicted me that the preacher was talking about me but the Devil was also busy working in my mind, telling me that I was so mean and ugly that if I went up to accept Jesus as Savior and to be baptized that the church would not accept me.

Thursday night of that week I felt the convicting power of the Holy Spirit in my heart that I should accept Jesus Christ as my Savior. I was standing on the second bench of Promise Land Church with my friends. Two of them went forward and was saved. I stood there holding onto the back of the bench in front of me so convicted by the Holy Spirit that I was trembling. The devil was at his worst in my heart at that moment. A battle raged in my mind. He kept reminding me how mean and ugly that I was and if I went forward I would not know what to say to the preacher.

The evangelist turned the service over to Bro. Powers and stepped back. Bro. Powers spoke a few words then said, " If anyone present would like to repent of their sins and accept Jesus Christ as his or her Savior come forward and take my hand." The door was opened for me. I could do that. I went forward and took his hand. Bro. Powers asked me, "Are accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?" I replied "Yes Sir."

That is all I said. I could not have said another word. I did not have to, God knew my heart. My actions spoke for me. A joy flooded my soul that night that has never gone away.

Bro. Powers addressed the church and said that I had accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior. Then asked the question, "What is the will of the church"? Someone made a motion that I be accepted, upon the profession of my faith in Jesus Christ, as a candidate for baptism then after baptism a member of the church. The church did accept me! I knew that on Sunday afternoon I would be baptized and become a church member. It was the custom of Promise Land Church on Sunday afternoon to baptize by emersion everyone saved during the week.

I shall always remember that night. The joy of the Lord flooded my soul. All the way home I thought about being saved, that I was forgiven for my sins, and that the church did accept me as a member. When I went to bed that night I cuddled up under the sheet and thought about having been saved and rejoiced. I could hardly wait until Sunday afternoon to be baptized and become a member of Promise Land Church. I knew that it was a church custom to baptize each new convert on Sunday afternoon following the revival.

The Devil did not leave me alone for long. The rest of the week he tried to discourage me. The following morning after being saved my sisters began to tease me. Today their teasing would not hurt me, but it did when I was twelve years old. Behind Mother's back they would laugh and say, "Frances' sins are going to be washed away in Berry Lake." I did not know how to answer them. I tried to pretend that they did not bother me but it did. The crushing blow was when I heard my father tell my mother that I was not old enough to know what I was doing that I had gone forward to be saved because my friend had. I knew better! Something wonderful had happened to me that night when I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior.

The following Sunday during lunch was the worst time of discouragement. It was time to go to Berry Lake to be baptized. We would have to go several miles in a horse drawn wagon through the woods to Berry Lake. My father stated that he was not going to take me to be baptized because he believed that I was too young to fully understand what I was doing and was just following my friends. Tears filled my eyes. I sat at the table stunned and speechless.

My father always made the final decisions in our home but this time Mother did. She turned and asked, "Frances, do you want to be baptized? Did you understand what the preacher said?"

I replied, "Yes, Mother!"

She turned to my father and said, "Tommy, hitch the horses to the wagon, we are going to take Frances to be baptized." He left the table without a word. Soon we were on our way. Happiness was restored.

Berry Lake was a few miles from home. In August, most of the small streams would be low with water and muddy but Berry Lake was fed with a spring and the water would be fresh and cold. I believed that we would be late for the service because Father never made the horses trot, but when we did arrive a crowd of church members were already there. A large area at the lake was cleared of underbrush. The lake bank had been cleaned and wooden steps had been built leading down to the water. At the side of the clearing, bed sheets were stretched between four trees to make a blind for ladies and girls to dress. On the opposite side a similar blind for the boys and men.

The baptismal service could not have been more sacred to me if it had been performed in a great cathedral. Bro. Powers went down the steps into the water and waded out to the center of the lake. Several of the men went into the water and stood near the steps and out in the water to support us. All of the people to be baptized formed a line and went single file down the steps into the water with the ladies and girls going first then the men and boys. We stood in a line waiting our turn to be baptized.

When my turn came, I felt so happy. Being baptized was very important and special to me. I felt loved! I knew that I was doing the right thing. Bro. Powers gave me a handkerchief and told me to hold it in my hand to put over my nose when I went down into the water. I held onto his left arm. He raised his right hand toward heaven and said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit". Then he placed his right hand behind my shoulders with the left over my nose and slowly lowered my entire body down into the water. That was about seventy years ago. I can still feel the water of Berry Lake completely covering me, making a beautiful picture of the burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Also, that after being saved, I should walk a new life dedicated to Jesus Christ.

We went behind the blind and changed into dry clothes. Then, we formed a line in the shade of a large tree. The audience sang as each one walked by and gave us the "right hand of church membership," thereby, welcoming each of us as members of Promise Land Missionary Baptist Church.

My sister and I started going to church every Sunday morning and night even if we had to walk alone. We had no fear of being molested only of snakes at night.

A few years later, I met my husband, A. C. Kilcrease. He had been saved and had already dedicated his life to the Lord. Most of our dating was walking to and from church. After we were married, I started going to ladies auxiliary with my husband's mother. I was surprised that so many of the older ladies present knew very little about the Bible. My father was not a church member but he read the Bible often. I heard him discuss Bible subjects with preachers who came to visit our home. But our teacher was very knowledgeable of the Bible. I admired her and realized by her example that God could use a woman to teach if she would prepare.

I resolved to study and to know something about the Bible. I started reading the Bible in Genesis, and remember to this day, much of what I learned during the first reading. It was so unlike my first attempt to read the Bible. I read until I came to the Books of the Prophets but understood little of what I was reading. I prayed for understanding.

When I was twenty-one, I dedicated by life to God as a Bible teacher. I knelt beside my bed and confessed to God that I would be a teacher if He could use me. I continued to study daily and had a burning desire to discuss with other Christians what I was reading. One friend told me that I was studying the Bible so much that it was going to drive me crazy. I have put that idea to a lifetime test and have learned that it is not true.

A few months later, the teacher of the teenage class moved away from our community and the church elected me as teacher. I had to study more. I prayed that the day would come that I would not have to study so hard but it never has. I have continued to study a lifetime. My daily goal is to know more about the Bible today than I knew yesterday and more tomorrow than I know today.

After over sixty-five years of Bible study, the Bible is just as fresh today as it was the day I started Genesis. I ask myself the question: "How could a book hold a person's interest for so many years and its subjects not be exhausted?" My conclusion is that it is truly the "Living Word." The more I study the more I find there is to know. My greatest treasure other than my personal relationship with God is the knowledge that I have acquired of the Bible. But, I Confess that I have not mastered the Bible.

I have continued to teach regularly except for a year or so that I had to take off when my twins were born.

My Lord has opened doors for me to serve Him beyond my fondest expectations. When asked where I get the energy to continue to serve God, I can truthfully say with Nehemiah, "The joy of the Lord is my strength!" (Nehemiah 8:10)

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