

BFF396 Born from Above

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith Families" podcast with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

Steve: I'm well, Scott. How are you?

Scott: I'm good. I'm all bundled up and ready to record.

Steve: This last weekend, I was in St. Louis with our Men's Retreat, which you've attended in the past.

Scott: How'd that go?

Steve: It went very well. You're still remembered. You have to come back and make another appearance. It's almost time for your once-a-decade appearance again.

Scott: I recall we almost died getting out of the driveway last time.

Steve: Yes, we had that Midwest snowstorm hit while we were there.

Scott: I was driving. We almost slid off the driveway because it was all icy.

Steve: Matt and I weren't pushing the car up the hill. We were just trying to keep it from going over the bank.

Scott: It was sliding. At one point you said, we need to stop moving because it's going further and then we're going to end up down the hill.

Steve: It's pretty steep side over there, too. We were keeping our feet in the grass because we had a little bit of purchase. That's one of those memories that you bond over.

Scott: I have nightmares about it, but OK.

Steve: Anyway, we had a wonderful time and we had two new guys. And that's always interesting to hear their perspective. We started meeting in 2009 and we don't do a whole lot different than we did at the very first meeting. Every man gets 15 minutes to share his story.

He can talk about anything he wants. The only thing is he's not allowed to talk about his ministry or his business or where he's from or even his family. We want to focus on the person themselves and we also don't interrupt.

Then for the next 15 minutes we ask questions. We stay away from trying to fix, or share resources, which guys normally do. We're going against the grain and ask questions like, "Well, what did you mean when you said that? You made an interesting comment there. Can you unpack that for us a little bit?"

At the end of this time, we've had a half an hour focused on getting to know one man. It's a joy to know, it's also special to be known. It's a gift that we give each other to value each other and hear each other. It's a unique format that God's led us to, and while we've refined it over the years, it really works.

From 2009 to 2024, we're still following the same format and we go deeper and deeper and we've shared our lives together. Even though we only meet once a year, we stay in touch throughout the year, especially if somebody's in a particularly difficult season of their life. We pray for them and keep in touch. There you go. Today we're going to talk about when I first heard the good news. Let's pray. Father, thank you that probably most of us listening to this podcast have heard the good news, and we've been transformed by it. We're new creatures as a result of it. It's manifestly a work of your spirit, as your spirit is revealing Jesus to us, convicting us of sin, helping us to say Jesus is Lord and witnessing with our spirit that we've been born again. It's an awesome, awesome experience. The more we know you, the more we understand all that went into it.

I pray that you help me today to be faithful in conveying these events and how they came to pass and that we'd all might be encouraged as we think about our own experiences and how you've drawn us. In Jesus name, amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: I have been attending church almost my entire life. I grew up going to church. We rarely missed. We even went to vacation Bible schools, etc. When I was a teenager, a friend of mine from the church, if I may say this, the other bad kid, because he and I were frequently in trouble, called me when I was 14.

I was about to enter my sophomore year of high school, which is a big thing, no more junior high school or elementary school, now, we're with the big kids. I was almost 15 and pretty tall for my age. I was over six feet. When he called, he said, "Would you like to go to a ranch in Colorado for \$25?"

Back then, that was a really good deal. I found out later that his aunt wanted him to hear the good news and she was sponsoring him and a friend. I was the friend. My mom, dad and I talked. I'd never been west of the Mississippi.

This seemed like a wonderful opportunity to go to a ranch in the Rocky Mountains. Even though I was a little nervous, I'd never been away from home for that long with people that I didn't know. I only knew Kevin.

It sounded like a wonderful opportunity so we met with one of the leaders and shortly thereafter I boarded a bus. For the next three days, I got to know the other kids going to the camp. I noticed something different about them, but I didn't know how to describe it.

Pretty soon, I learned that the camp in Colorado was a Christian camp and most of the kids were deeply involved in a ministry called Young Life. No one asked me if I was a Christian or even a believer, since I'd attended church since I was a baby, I would have probably said, "Yes." I thought everybody was a Christian, but somebody put it differently. They said, "Have you met Jesus?"

That was a great question, because I couldn't say that I had. The way that question hit me was, wow, I knew about Jesus, I knew about Christmas, I knew about Easter. I've been going to church all my life, but, did I know Him personally? Have I met Him? That question planted a seed.

Once we arrived at camp, we were each assigned a cabin with a counselor. Every morning in the cabin, we had devotions and studied the Bible. In the evening, we attended meetings. The whole camp would be there. Wonderful singing, skits, a message, and everything I heard was good. I knew why they called it the good news. Throughout the week, I learned that I could have a fresh start in life by asking God to forgive my sins, and ask Him to come into my heart and be my savior.

I was a bad kid. I told you, I was in trouble in Sunday school. One day in sixth grade, I got into trouble and got a three-day vacation (suspension). That was devastating to my mom, and as a result, devastating to me. I'd never seen my mom cry before. I thought, "Man, I'm a bad kid," but now I was being offered a clean slate. If I asked God to forgive my sins, He would wipe them away and I would be a new creature. I would have a fresh start.

One afternoon I found a quiet spot on the side of a mountain, and I asked God to forgive my sins and come into my heart, and He did, and I was different, and I knew it. I had met Jesus myself. I told my counselor and the other campers in my cabin.

I recognize now that I had entered into the reality of Romans 10:9-10. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes and is justified, and with the mouth, one confesses and is saved."

According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, I was a new Steve. "For if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold the new has come." Because I had been born anew or as the margin renders it, born from above, or born again.

Jesus explained this new birth in John 3:3-6. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'"

As I entered high school that fall, I met a friend of our family who was the vice principal of the high school, and I asked him. "I think there's a club that meets here called Young Life." He searched his records but couldn't find them.

Several months went by before I was given a slip of paper with an address and told that this would be where the club was meeting this week. Turns out our Young Life

group was not associated with the school, but met in people's homes during the week, so I began to attend these meetings and enjoyed them.

I was not consistent in my attendance and my newfound relationship with God suffered. I heard someone describe this kind of journey as a roller coaster. I was up one day and down the next. One weekend I attended a retreat and rededicated myself to follow Jesus.

Sadly, the roller coaster ride continued into my third year of college. I had tasted God's goodness in Colorado and I knew He was real and He had met me throughout high school, but I was not a faithful follower until I read a book.

In the spring of my junior year, the dean of student affairs, who was a good friend and mentor, told me of an opportunity to serve as a counselor in the Pocono Mountains of Northeast Pennsylvania with troubled teens. These young people would be accompanied by their probation officers.

I had no experience working with folks like this and I sought help in our local library. I found a book in the teen section called "The Cross and the Switchblade." It was written by David Wilkerson, who founded Teen Challenge.

As I read this book, God worked in my heart and partway through, I put the book down and I said, "OK God, here we go." God knew what I meant. I was tired of the roller coaster. I was committed to following him fully to the best of my ability. I served out my eight weeks at the camp and then headed back to college determined to seek first His kingdom.

When I had left school in the spring, there was one committed believer in my circle of friends, but when I returned, I discovered that God had been at work in the hearts of three other men, and the five of us became a team.

We needed fellowship, so we studied the Bible and prayed together. We built each other up, and are still friends to this day. I couldn't have made it without them. Rick, Andy, Danny, and Joey, aka Squeak.

I think it was one of my five friends, who gave me some really wise counsel. He said, "You need to memorize 1 John 1:9. Because you're going to be tempted to feel unforgiven when God says that you are indeed forgiven." 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." I don't think I'd ever memorized the scripture before.

He also taught me, "Faith is more important than feeling." You might not feel forgiven, but God's word declares that if you have asked Him to forgive your sins, He will faithfully forgive them and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

He was right, and that was a huge lesson. I learned to rely on the word of God and not my emotions. Since then, I've added other verses for ammunition against doubt and unbelief, such as Psalm 103:10-13.

"He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far, does He remove our transgressions from us? As the Father shows compassion to His children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him."

Paul describes this approach to life as walking by faith. 2 Corinthians 5:7, "We walk by faith, not by sight," or feeling or emotion. The word of God is always true. As this verse declares, when we confess to God, then God, Who is faithful and just, will forgive and cleanse us. Period, end of story. Amen.

As I developed this habit of reading through the Bible each year, I have found more encouragement, especially from men who have also sinned and sinned grievously and yet were fully restored to God. Paul reminds us in Romans 15:4. "Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope."

I found hope in reading about the life of David. If you're not familiar with David, read 1 Samuel if you want to read the account of an amazing life, this young man began as a humble shepherd, taking care of the sheep. David was the youngest of a large family of boys. He became a gifted singer, and a warrior who killed a giant named Goliath. Most people know that.

When he became king, he sinned grievously with another man's wife and then had him murdered. All the details are in scripture for all to know. He was king. He could have expunged that from the record. He could have rewritten history, which is what they're trying to do today in our culture.

David left it all out there. When he was confronted by the prophet Nathan, he acknowledged that he had indeed violated God's commands. He'd committed adultery, he'd committed murder, and he had tried to cover it up. The results of his sin wreaked havoc in his own family for years.

Nevertheless, David sought God and asked Him for forgiveness. Psalm 51 is David's prayer, and I have used the language of this prayer many times when I have sinned. Here are seven of my favorite verses to close out this episode.

"Have mercy on me, O God, because of Your unfailing love. Because of Your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin, for I recognize my rebellion. It haunts me day and night against You. You alone have I sinned. I have done what is evil in Your sight." That's the first four verses.

Verses 10–12, "Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal or right spirit within me. Do not banish me from Your presence, and don't take Your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and make me willing to obey You." These are great prayers.

David faced up to his iniquity. He acknowledged that he had sinned against God. He repented, then he cried out to God and asked Him to forgive him for his sin, and God did. He was still the king. God did restore him, and he restored him completely.

To this day, we know Jesus as the son of David. Jesus didn't hide the fact that He was from the line of David. It's huge encouragement to me to read about the life of David. I grieve with Bathsheba. I grieve with her husband, Uriah. I grieve with what David's sons went through, Absalom and Amnon, and the havoc that came about in his own home because of his sin.

However I also am so grateful that he put it in there, because if God can forgive the Davids, the Peters, and the Pauls, then he can forgive all of us. Amen?

Scott: Amen. Powerful stuff. The verse that comes to mind for me is, Romans 8:1, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ, Jesus."

Steve: Amen.

Scott: That one is one of the more powerful ones that didn't hit me initially when I came to Christ. Later on, I've come back to that over and over again and with my children. It's made such a powerful impact on me and my family.

Because Satan will come after you and try and remind you that you're evil and worthless and not worthy of any of this, which to an extent, that's true. Jesus says there's no condemnation anymore.

Steve: Amen. To me, condemnation is not feeling fully forgiven. That's why we have to have these scriptures to keep reminding us as well as the devil, because we're pretty tough on ourselves, too. We need to remind ourselves. We need to remind principalities and powers and the devil himself that there is no condemnation.

We have confessed. We have repented. We have turned and God has forgiven us and restored us. This is something that we all battle. I think earnest Christians probably battle condemnation more than others because they're so desirous to do what is right, and they're so careful. Sometimes we can go long stretches where we do well with God's help.

Then, when we blow it, we just think, "Oh, I know better. How can I still be doing these things?" Then we start feeling condemned but there is no condemnation to those that are in Christ, Jesus. Amen.

Scott: In the church, we do a pretty good job of shooting our wounded. The devil may be getting some help in terms of heaping on the condemnation because there are certain sins that are more acceptable than others? Do you know what I mean?

Steve: Yeah, absolutely. The church can be a tough place. To go back to what we started with right in the beginning, one of the men that came to St. Louis this week

hadn't been there for a few years. He said, "This is so rare to be able to share and be transparent and to open up and to not be judged." Isn't that amazing?

Scott: Yep.

Steve: Because it is hard in many circumstances, if you're in the church or even in a men's group, we take our life in our hands when we get real transparent, and then we get judged. We get the cold shoulder and, sadly, some people gossip and that's awful. God has given us something special where we can be with other men, and can confess our shortcomings, explaining exactly what's going on in our heart and in our relationship with our wife and our kids. We have a bunch of guys who are bearing each other's burdens instead of judging.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: Amen. Let's pray. Father, thank You for birthing me from above. Thank You for the work of Your spirit. Thank You that Jesus provided a way for me to be clean, and He shed His blood to take away my sin. Thank You for the Father who had a plan for my life and for all of our lives from the very beginning, even before the foundation of the world.

Here we are, new creatures, deliver us from condemnation, deliver us from doubt, deliver us from unbelief, give us an appetite to be near You and to be in Your word and to walk in the light of that instead of our own self condemnation, our own feelings. In Jesus name, Amen.

Scott: Amen. That's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the "Building Faith Families" podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at spdemme@gmail.com. If you have a question for me, you can reach me at scott@unsocializedmedia.com. Thanks for joining us. Have a great week.