

Personal Testimony-Leo Wisniewski

I was reared in a family of six children, spending my last five years of secondary education in Pittsburgh. I was the fourth child, having two brothers and three sisters. My mother and father were hard-working Roman Catholics with strong values and a very sacrificial commitment to their children. I loved sports of every kind and intense competitiveness was fostered in our neighborhood games from an early age. As a boy who loved sports there was no greater place on the planet than being in Pittsburgh in the 70's. The Steelers and Pirates, we are fam-a-lee, were rockin' and we were a part of it! We're from the town with the great football team, we cheer the Pittsburgh Steelers! That polka and the memories I have as kids dancing around our neighborhood banging garbage can lids is still strongly apart of me. I went to church every Sunday and saw the value of my involvement as important for shaping personal values and forming my character but I believed that I had outgrown my need for it in my late teen years. By eighteen, I was seeking validation as a man in three main areas that I now see as lies of false masculinity. The first was through physical toughness and talent. My success in football and wrestling provided this validation. The second lie was sexual conquest. My growing sexual experience with women and my teammate's approval of my success in this area was another false validation of manhood. The third area of false masculinity was financial success or power. My scholarship at Penn State and some of the money earned in summer work helped provide some measure of success in this area but I was looking to the prospect of playing in the NFL for my real payday and big-time validation. Though I sought to be validated by my coaches, my peer group, and by women in these three areas I experienced a growing emptiness and conviction of sin in my life as a result.

Soon after my arrival at PSU I began noticing a small group of men on the football team who professed their faith in Jesus Christ openly and unashamedly. Some were outstanding players and others never saw game action but they shared a strong bond of love for one another, a compassion for all of their teammates, and an intense desire to please God with their obedience to Him through his Word. They got my attention as they reached out to me in friendship. I saw their strong foundation of faith in Christ and their experience as brothers in Christ gave them all the validation they needed as men to have a deep sense of their own identity. I was binge drinking and wearing a mask on the outside to cover a lot of my fear and emptiness. After a long summer reading the Gospel of John many times over I understood for the first time that I was a great sinner and I needed a great Savior! God's love broke through in my heart in seeing why the Father sent his Son (John 3:16-17). John 1:12 spoke powerfully to me as well, "He came to his own but they did not receive Him, but to as many as received Him to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believed on his name." To become a child of God in Christ it must be through adoption by saving faith and not just intellectual assent (Romans 8:15-16). I had the head knowledge. I knew the Christmas story. I needed the heart of trust and full reliance upon Christ. My sin had resulted from Adam, bred in the very DNA of my nature. It resulted in spiritual death and separation from God (Romans 3:10, 23). Jesus, whose name means the Lord saves, has made a way for us through his substitutionary death on the cross and glorious resurrection from the dead.

In 1981, in September of my junior year at PSU, I got down on my knees in a dirty old locker room at Texas A&M during pre-game and prayed to receive Christ as my Savior and my Lord. God met me in the sincerity of that prayer of faith and filled me with his Holy Spirit. He did a heart transplant on me through regeneration (II Cor. 5:17) and I began to walk in the newness of Christ's resurrection life (Romans 6:4). I had a new hunger for God's word so I got committed to the team Bible study and fellowship. I joined a local Bible church where I was baptized in a public proclamation of my faith. He has been shaping me over these past 28 years to be the man He created me to be. It has been a process with many failures but He has been faithful in conforming me to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) as a husband, father, and a disciple. Serving Christ in full-time ministry with men (www.whitefieldsfoundation.org) is a privilege where God uses my failures as a gateway to connect with men in brokenness. In our weakness Christ is glorified! It is intensely satisfying to see the transforming power of the gospel at work in the lives of the men we disciple. Making disciples is now the passionate focus of my life and the result of Christ's work of grace in me.