My Walk of Faith and Lou Gehrig Disease (ALS) by Ron Christy



Many who read this testimony account, or perhaps by God's supernatural grace will listen to me give a verbal testimony, will know that it comes from my heart and spirit. I was encouraged to write down personal spiritual thoughts by my beloved friend and prayer partner, Gary Austin.

My desire is that the Lord and Holy Spirit will use what I share in your life. I will not focus upon the many trials of this disease, but mainly on my Lord, His Word, prayer and my walk of faith. I have asked the Holy Spirit to direct my thoughts, so that what is written will bring much glory to God the Father, and the Lord Jesus.

I am so very thankful for my wonderful, loving wife Wendy, for her diligent care of me throughout this very challenging illness. I thank God for giving me such a fantastic wife who has always shown a servants heart. I love you, Wendy! Our two children, now young adults {Angela and Matthew} are both very precious to us.

I am also thankful for my brother, Dave Christy, for his prayers, loving concern and our close friendship throughout the years. I will also include my relatives in Indianapolis, Indiana who have been faithful in their love and prayers {Derrick Christy, Jeanene Christy, Blake Christy, Jena Christy, Sarah Christy and Debbie Cunningham}.

I have been privileged by the Lord to serve Him and His people in the prayer ministry of Winona

Lake Grace Brethren Church, Winona Lake, Indiana. I love and hold the pastors in high regard as men of God who consistently demonstrate a Christ-like servant's heart. I have appreciated so much the spirit of love and prayer that many at WLGBC have extended to me. You and many other friends are all dearly loved!

"I will lead you in paths you have not known before"

"Do not fear; trust me"

You may be questioning why I included the two statements shown above. I'll explain later why both are significant. But before presenting the balance of my testimony, I'll share brief comments about the disease.

I was officially diagnosed with ALS late in 2011. However, I was pretty sure that I experienced some signs of the disease earlier that year. I have seen ALS close up as both my mother and sister suffered from this disease and went home to be with the Lord years ago.

For those who don't know, ALS is a degenerative neural/muscular disease for which there is no known cure. Oversimplified {from a layman's perspective}, defective neuron cells originating in the brain enter the spinal column and body areas attacking muscle and nerve tissue and progressively weakens them. The body is covered, or as I would put it, lovingly wrapped by God, in muscle to provide us organ protection, structural support, balance and strength for everything that we do. Imagine the extreme exhaustion your body feels after hard exertion. You collapse in a chair, or lay down, seemingly incapable to move for a given time. That's far from a perfect example of what happens to someone with ALS, but they do progressively become weaker and weaker until they lose body strength. It can get really challenging as the diaphragm is the primary muscle controlling breathing. Other symptoms arise which can further complicate daily living. But that's not what I want to focus on.

What has it meant for me to live by faith, prayer and walk with the Lord? I expressed in some detail what it means to walk by faith, living a life of prayer with dependence upon the Holy Spirit, in my book "*Holy War of Faith*". What I will do now is apply these spiritual principles briefly to some of my life experiences before and during ALS. I will not cite many Scriptures in this testimony (reference my book), but I trust you will detect spiritual truths.

During my adult years the Lord has spoken to me verbally once, at other times in my mind with clear

messages and has dramatically captured my attention on a couple other occasions. I have frequently felt His presence as I worshiped, praised and fellowshipped with Him. The Holy Spirit has filled my soul enabling me to pray and worship the Father and Son. The Spirit is my constant loving companion. God has placed godly men and families in Wendy and my life as dear friends for many occasions throughout the years for great Christian fellowship. They are all dearly loved and are precious to us. There are too many to mention and I would never want to omit anyone. The Bible states that iron sharpens iron *{Proverbs 27:17}* which applies to dear brothers that I have had the privilege to know and frequently met with for mutual challenge, prayer, Bible study, and encouragement.

The Lord got my attention as a young man to seek Him through a life of prayer and a heart commitment to know the Word. On one occasion during my early adult years while seated on a couch intently reading the Word, I distinctly heard my first name {Ron} whispered (still, small voice). I immediately looked to my left down a short hall curious if someone was standing there. As a single adult in a two story home this experience could unnerve someone. The opposite was true, as I felt completely peaceful. I later determined that the Lord graciously called my name to express His love and to encourage me. On another occasion, while seated on my bed reading the Word, I suddenly felt the presence of Jesus sitting near me. It's impossible to fully describe this experience. I was definitely surprised with the realization of His presence, but when the Lord decides to come near, He always brings peace to the heart and mind as we enjoy His loving, sweet presence.

As a father with young children the Lord kept drawing me to be alone and fellowship with Him. I was always intrigued and challenged with the invitation and desire our Lord expressed to abide with us *{John 14 & 15}*. During those years I dug into the Word to better understand truth while serving in church ministries. I was greatly challenged to grow in my faith by a godly pastor Larry McCall, who was and continues to be my friend. I was privileged to serve on the church deacon board which God used to further grow me in faith. You can read about a couple other experiences during this time in my book.

During those initial 10 to 15 years I loved to discuss Scripture, evangelize and at times enjoyed debating to get my views across with others. I was much too head-strong and prideful. The Lord caused me to realize that He wants us to know the God of the Word intimately, not just fill our minds with His Word for the sake of knowledge. Knowledge alone will puff up. All true knowledge and understanding are found in revealed truth and comes from God. The disclosure of an amazing God is the main subject of the Bible. The Word reveals the heart of the Father, how He thinks and responds and it invites us to enjoy the miracle of saving grace and closeness with Him. We are His children and He is our ABBA "*Daddy*" Father.

I love the profound truth expressed at the close of *I Corinthians 13 – "So now faith, hope, and love abide {they're all important}, these three, but the greatest of these is love."* I knew that a deepening love for the Lord would spill over and cause us to share that love with His people. I wrote about that in my book concerning the Holy Spirit and drinking from His endless well, His river of

blessing. Love is an action verb originating from the heart for the benefit of others. As an adult believer, I eventually understood many Bible truths, yet I was increasingly aware that I needed to grow to know God. I would later understand more completely what this would mean.

The Lord never lets His children drift very far away without getting our attention. He allowed me to drift in the spiritually dry desert of this fallen world so that I would better understand and appreciate my great need to love and to be close to Him. He is intensely jealous for our love, and desires to purge our lives of false idols. The most important truth in this life is that He can only satisfy the soul. When all the materialism and vanity crumbles, we discover that He is all we ever had and ever needed.

Yet, He understands us completely, because we are *one spirit with Him {I Corinthians 6}*. The full force of this truth defines our close intimacy with Him which is closer than the marriage bond. Our relationship with the Father and the Lord Jesus is foundationally that of a loving union. I love *Psalm 139* which describes not only God's majesty, but how precious we are to Him. When I fail to live in this truth, I miss the enjoyment of walking in step with the Spirit. However, He never stops teaching me to know, love, and serve Him and to become more like Jesus. I am so thankful how God has worked in my life during those years to mold and prepare me.

Prior to being diagnosed with ALS, my employment at Zimmer Corporation and home responsibilities kept me very busy. But I was committed to make time to meet with the Lord. Nothing is more important than to be alone with the Lord. Investing much time in the Word and in prayerful union will spiritually transform us. This will impact everything in our lives. When we allow the world system values to control our priority choices, we fail to live as we are called by the Lord. I was also committed to be a witness for the Lord and to do my best to be a light for Him {though imperfect I may be} to impact others. I discussed one account regarding this in my book. Please refer to that for a more detailed explanation.

I'll mention an important life situation that significantly impacted me. I prayed during one of several work force reductions to be released from my company and God answered my prayer in mid-2009. That may sound weird to some, but I had a growing heart passion to invest more time to be alone and diligently seek Him. I sensed God calling me to meet with Him to further transform my life and to direct me into ministry.

It was June and the weather was pleasant. The first week I was home I carried a chair, my Bible, note pad, pencil and sat under the shade of a tree in my side yard. I remember saying something close to this – *"Well, here I am Lord. I'm here to be with you and listen to you. Lord, strip the other needed layers of worldly crud off me that would hinder our fellowship and change me."* Those daily meetings, plus long walks where I would praise, worship, listen and talk with Him continued intently for six months. That period of spiritual commitment and renewal established the pattern for my life

forward. It's so incredible when you get alone and seek to turn the world off and the spiritual dimension on, asking the Holy Spirit to direct you. Don't get the impression that I am some spiritual man who always walks in the Spirit. I wish that were true, but we are all dependent upon His grace and daily sanctification. Life is a spiritual war zone and God was not through changing and using me. All I can say is that I experienced a whole new spiritual dimension and direction in my life. I was really meeting with my heavenly Father, Lord Jesus and Holy Spirit. WOW!!!

The Lord, in His providence, led us to another church when I reached my mid-fifties {Winona Lake Grace Brethren}. We were unclear why we had changed churches other than my belief that God was directing our path. I had decided to keep a low profile initially, but I enjoy serving so much that this would change during the following year. Wendy and I became involved in an Adult Bible Fellowship {ABF} and were beginning to get to know some of the church family better. During that year a leadership opportunity presented itself in the ABF and I offered myself as their temporary Shepherd. A few months after this I was getting better acquainted with pastors Bruce Barlow and Kip Cone. I also started to become involved with my heart passion- the church prayer team. That's when my relationship with Tom Julien started. The pastors wanted to relaunch the prayer team and expand its vision. I was more than willing to serve the Lord and the church.

Initial leadership committees were forming and meeting for *Imagine The Potential* campaign to expand ministry facilities and Pastor Bruce included me. God was clearly involved. I never sought a leadership position, but God was orchestrating everything. I discovered that my name was included on the Finance committee. It's not that I don't get turned on with finance, but I was puzzled why I was seated in a room with a half dozen very capable team members. I recall offering my services to pray at the beginning and close of the meeting, but that was the extent of my interest. God took care of this as Pastor Bruce scheduled a meeting with me soon after that team meeting. I had no idea what the meeting subject was. However, this meeting stands out in my mind. I can still visualize Bruce telling me that prayer was going to be a vital focus of this stewardship campaign and he wanted me to consider leading such a team. I recall responding that I didn't need time to consider this ministry, because I believed God had called me to do it.

The reason that I included the details in the above paragraph is to illustrate that God was working in the specific details of my life after I had yielded to His leading and to walk by faith. I communicated with the prayer team about the Hub project and we worked to pray for and to encourage the church body. I don't consider myself to be an accomplished speaker; in fact, I tend to be a bit timid when I speak before people. However, I had made a promise to the Lord that I would never shy away from prayer-speaking opportunities, in any venue, but I would depend totally upon Him and the Spirit for the ability. God has always been faithful. I committed to the well known Scripture in Philippians 4:13; *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."* This has been dear to my heart to the present time. All things are really possible through Christ who loves and strengthens us. We simply need to believe what the Word declares, then step forward and walk by faith. Christ always honors

faith.

I really enjoyed a couple circuit journeys visiting most ABF's the next 18 months to talk about the Hub and prayer. I had opportunities to teach about prayer for several Sundays in a couple ABF's. Some may recall the "prayer man" which is the title several groups would use to introduce me. I loved that introduction. I soon lost most of my fear of speaking before people, because I loved the ministry God had called me to, and the people I was speaking before. That makes all the difference in ministry; it's not about duty or us. The Lord wants us to follow the leading of the Spirit to serve with a heart of complete dependence upon Him.

During this time I started meeting with Tom Julien on a fairly regular basis. That continued for about a year to discuss the prayer team, the prayer partner ministry, future prayer initiatives and to pray. He quietly, patiently, yet purposely discipled and encouraged me. What a blessing it was to get to know Tom on a personal basis. I continue to enjoy our fellowship time. He is a great man of God committed to the Lord, God's people and prayer.

I also got acquainted with Mike Grill and attended his prayer class in 2010. The Holy Spirit led me to share with this class my heart concerning prayer and fellowship with God. In 2011, I began coordinating with Mike on church prayer ministry issues. I loved this man so much and greatly benefited from our times of sharing and personal emails. He possessed what I would term a *radical faith!*

The pastors were emphasizing the prayer partner ministry to the church body. The prayer team functioned to encourage everyone to pursue a partner to pray with. Several of us visited most ABF's and youth groups to encourage them to have prayer partners. I spoke briefly words from my heart stating that linking with a brother or sister is so vital to the Christian life. We all need each other in our battle against the world, flesh and the devil.

I really enjoyed meeting frequently with my prayer partner, Gary Austin. I could write much about these interactions; how challenging, provoking, point-counter-point stimulating, fun, prayerful, etc. they were. We still meet regularly, although it's a bit more challenging for me. Gary knows that I like to talk and he finally has the verbal advantage {ha!}. When you fellowship for 2 ½ years with someone, you soon get personal and share deep personal truths. Only my wife, immediate family, several friends and Gary have heard me share how the Lord has been near me. I'll try and briefly explain below.

Let me first state that I have never questioned or have been angry with my Lord that He allowed me to have ALS. God is purposeful in all that He does and He loves us so much. His wisdom and ways are far beyond our ability to fully comprehend in this life. That's why the Bible states the righteous are to live by faith and trust in His infinite wisdom and goodness. The flesh cries out for immediate relief when life hurts, or when we suffer. That's natural and the Lord understands our frame. When

the props of this life are removed we face the truth that we are all really quite weak and totally dependent upon our heavenly Father. All things really do work together for good to those who are called according to His purpose {*Romans 8:28*}.

You will recall the prophetic messages that I documented at the beginning of my testimony. I also stated earlier that I enjoyed taking long spiritual worship, praise and prayer walks. I often sensed the nearness of the Holy Spirit and the Lord. I loved to listen and enjoy their presence. On one such walk the Lord clearly spoke this phrase to my mind – *"I will lead you in paths you have not known before."* I knew right away that this message was from the Lord. I did not ask what these paths would be, but ALS was the vehicle the Lord chose for me. I always carried my iPhone to play songs of worship and praise. On one of those walks my iPhone started to play a song I had not chosen. It was about the Father's love, provision and care for us.

One day, a few months later, while seated in my living room quietly meditating, the Lord impressed this message to my mind – *"Do not fear; trust me."* Often when I have been seated outside in my yard praying and worshipping, I have sensed the presence of Jesus right beside me. After preparing my heart, I have been graced to pray in the Spirit when I asked for His enabling. There are many other such experiences that I have had with the Lord.

I do not state these experiences to impress anyone to think highly of me. Please do not! Think highly of our glorious, gracious and loving God. Seek closeness with the Holy Spirit with your total being and crave such union. I've learned by faith to seek with all my heart to listen and to be led to pray with the Holy Spirit. We learn to do that by patiently waiting, by a heart commitment, and by living for His glory with a sanctified life. If we regard iniquity in our hearts He will not hear us (Psalm 66). Another way to say this is if we harbor or retain sin that has not been confessed, we can't expect His fellowship or blessing.

Many of you could also cite precious times of fellowship. I firmly believe, based upon Scripture, that close spiritual fellowship should be normative for all believers with their heavenly Father. In John 14, Christ promised that he would manifest himself to those who loved Him and the Father. I'm convinced that we frequently receive what we value most in this life. Wendy and I have been blessed to have faithful brothers and sisters in Christ for encouragement and to pray for us. I have loved to study the life of King David because of his heart passion to know, love and obey his God. He was far from a perfect man, but he was a great confessor of his sin demonstrating a humble, contrite heart. God referred to him as a man after His own heart. WOW!

I will relate one other transforming event where the Lord graced my life to experience personal revival in my total being. I discussed earlier how the Lord stripped layer after layer of this fallen world off me. Purging the life of false gods and having too much of a worldly focus can be quite difficult and painful. However, the other side of the cleansing, renewal and revival process is such a spiritual blessing. Yet it's not a one time in life experience. It's a daily spiritual battle to achieve victory. It's not that I hadn't asked the Lord's forgiveness for sin and believed I was forgiven. There

is something more powerful and needed that He wants to do within us – namely to confess *all known sin* to others we have sinned against and to seek their forgiveness. The Spirit led me to do that which resulted in me writing letters to people naming the sin and asking forgiveness. That wasn't easy, but it was so freeing!

Following what I described above, I read the Bible, gave thanks in prayer and enjoyed a great time of worship and praise. I continued my inward meditation for several hours. When I went to bed my heart was still reciting Scripture, praising and worshipping Him and this continued for 90 minutes without a pause. The best way that I know how to describe this was that the words seemed to flow from the inner recesses of my being from the Holy Spirit. I was praying in the Spirit and at the end of that blessed time, I was not at all fatigued. I simply closed my eyes and soon went to sleep. There are other times that I have prayed with the Spirit's enabling and leading.

I'll conclude this testimony by sharing some thoughts from the past year up to the present time. Despite ALS, my heart and spirit is steadfastly committed to walk by faith and completely trust the Lord. His goodness and faithfulness is unchanging. We need to trust this truth in both the good and bad times. I have asked the Lord to fill me with His love to express this with His people. The flesh interferes at times, but I believe God has enabled me. During my days at home, I constantly talk with the Lord and recite Scripture promises. I breathe, walk, swallow, move and do everything by faith. He has answered so many of my prayers to be near me and to provide for me in my weak and helpless state. Praise Him!

It has been my joy and privilege to serve WinonaLakeGraceBrethrenChurch in the prayer ministry. I enjoyed many weekly visits to the church office during 2012 to encourage and pray with several in the staff. They are a hard working group of dedicated servants of the Lord. I appreciate and love them all. We should pray for them daily. I frequently surprised Bruce Barlow and Kip Cone by stopping at their office doors to say hello. They always had time for a hug, brief expressions of mutual love and praying together.

I am so thankful that many in the church are committed to prayer. That's very remarkable and demonstrates the fact that the Holy Spirit has been at work. He deserves all the praise and glory. My desire is that you will ask the Spirit daily to lead and direct your life and take every opportunity to talk with the Spirit and the Lord. God is always there waiting to hear and talk with us if we diligently seek Him with all our heart. Taking needed time to be quiet and to listen to Him is important. He doesn't shout. He may even surprise you with a blessed encounter.

The tables have been turned. Instead of my privilege of serving to bless others, many wonderful people have been showering me with multiple expressions of love. They always express love and speak encouraging words to me each Sunday. Even though I have lost my ability to speak clearly, they have understood and poured out love and kind words. I have seen the love in your eyes, and felt

such love in your hugs. Wow, I am truly a blessed man! With the help of a dear brother, I was able to attend the last evening of the April 2013 Men's Retreat. I was greatly impacted by many men walking up to hug and say encouraging words. It was a powerful session with many men attending. Many in the church body have sent me encouragement cards, prayed with and for me – thank you! Several have stopped over to our home to say hello and to pray. You have taken me to special church and ministry events. I am overwhelmed by your many expressions of Christ-like love. Wendy and I thank God for you.

It's been a privilege and joy to minister with such a fantastic Prayer Team. They have ministered and encouraged me in so many ways. I love them all. There names are worthy to be mentioned: *Gary Austin, Steve Friedberg, Kathy Friedberg, Jim Hill, Jason Lenon, Tami Miller, Tom Miller, Cathie Peebles, Jim Mccoomb.* Keep up the great work team to fan the flame of the Holy Spirit's work in many hearts regarding prayer. I am reminded what our Lord said -*"My house shall be called a house of prayer"* {Matthew 21}. I am thankful that our pastors are committed to prayer and the vital ministry of the Holy Spirit. They have lead the way regarding Prayer Partners along with a prayer emphasis during many Sunday services. My prayer is that all in the WLGBC church body will have a prayer partner.

I'll conclude by again saying that I appreciate and love Wendy so very much! Words cannot adequately express what I feel for her. I have faith in God and His Word to be healed, but I know God's perfect plan and purpose will be done in my life. Praise and bless His holy name!

Pray Without Ceasing!

Note: Ron passed into glory in the early morning hours of October 16, 2013. We encourage you to leave a comment below. Jim Hill

Ron_Christy_My_Journey_of_Faith_and_ALS.pdfDownload