



*The
Truth
Set Me
Free*

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This is the story of one Salvadoran woman's search for truth. The answers she found went counter to her upbringing, but in the end, she found peace. Her life glows with an inner light and joy that comes only from God.

When my husband told me that he'd accepted Christ, I thought he'd gone crazy. He tried to explain how he felt, but I protested, reminding him that my beliefs and practices were the truth. I thought the church we had grown up in was the church of Christ. I had never imagined José or I would ever leave it. The thought was so strange at first that I couldn't understand it.

"No, you don't understand," he said. "I wish I could paint a picture of how I feel so you could see."

"No, you're the one who doesn't understand," I told him, frustrated. But nothing I said could sway him, and I couldn't even think of changing. The teachings both of us had received since early childhood were entrenched too deeply in me.

José didn't try to convince me to believe. He just told me he'd pray that God would illuminate my heart.

“I’ll pray for you, too, that He would bring you back to the right path,” I said.

After José made his decision for Christ, he began attending church services and Bible studies in a village about nine kilometers away. “Come with me to church,” he begged. “I’d love to have my wife there with me.” So I went. I enjoyed the beautiful singing and the preaching, but I was sorry these people were so mistaken. I didn’t realize I was the mistaken one!

After the second time, I decided not to go again. I was following the religion of my parents, and it wasn’t right for me to attend an evangelical church. Besides, what would people say? They had already started talking. “Ah,” they told me, “now you’re going to be evangelical, just like José.”

“Not me,” I vowed. José could believe the way he wanted, but I would never change. “You can go to that church,” I told him, “but I have to do what’s best for my soul. You choose your own path. I have to do what I feel is right.” I felt my salvation depended on faithfully attending my church and regularly participating in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

Wisely, José never pressured me. I don’t know what would have happened if he

had. I told him that if he argued or tried to force me to change, we'd have to separate. I loved him as a husband, but I couldn't agree with his beliefs.

After my second visit to church, I avoided the members as much as possible. When the Christians from José's church came to our house to study the Bible, I tried to finish all my work so I could leave as soon as they arrived. Often I met them as I was leaving. The pastor would stop and talk with me, asking where I was going and inviting me to the study. "No, I'm on my way to my church's celebration," I'd explain, and hurry on. Something about them made me uncomfortable.

Sometimes, though, I couldn't get all of my work done. I worked in the kitchen, banging the pans and making a racket, or sat idly in the house, but all the time I was listening. The pastor's teaching interested me, but to my mind, it was wrong. Still, I couldn't help wondering about the things I overheard. To answer my questions, I tried to memorize the references so I could look them up later. I read the passages in my Bible and discovered some of them told me the opposite of what I'd been taught. Why did my church ignore so many of these truths?

I saw, too, how José was changing. He sacrificed to go hear the Word of God. Sometimes he walked long distances in the dark, arriving home drenched by the rain. When I protested, he answered that the teaching was so beautiful. His face shone with the inner change.

Then began my spiritual battle. For three months, I studied the Bible, prayed, and cried. When José was gone, I found his Bible study papers and pored over them. I could hardly believe what I read. If what the Bible said was true, much of what I had learned—much of what I'd ever believed—was false! My mind was filled with questions and doubts. I didn't know where I was, what I believed, or what was right. Insecurity overwhelmed me; I felt as if I were nothing.

"Why, Jesus?" I prayed. "Why do I have all these doubts? The church my parents taught me to attend is Your church; You founded it. So why am I feeling like this? Take away all these questions and give me the stability I had before." I didn't realize that, instead of falling away from God, as I thought, He was drawing me closer to Himself every day.

At home alone, I thought and wondered

and prayed until I felt as if I were drowning, struggling in deep water with no one to save me and no way to escape. No one else, not even my husband, knew what I was going through. I couldn't sleep well and I lost my appetite. At times I felt as if I were going crazy. Often I threw myself on the bed and cried for hours. Thoughts kept whirling through my brain. Was the church of my parents in error? Was it a mistake to baptize infants? Was it a sin to trust in the saints and the mother of Jesus? The Latin American version of Isaiah 45:20 spoke to me when it said those who follow processions of idols of wood, praying to gods who can't save them, are ignorant and foolish.

The thought that I might be wrong was terrible. I was a devout person, not like those "halfway" religious folks. I was even a *catequista*, one who taught children doctrines of the church. Since my childhood, I had loved God and wanted to please Him. How could it be that my beliefs weren't correct—that all the good things I had done to please God were an offense to Him?

When I finally accepted that the things my parents had taught me, including bowing down in front of saints in the procession of the crosses, couldn't save me, I felt as tiny

and insignificant as a little ant. I cried out to God and asked Him to forgive me.

Now I had made my decision, but I didn't have enough courage to tell anyone. Fear of what people would say held me back. Several times I tried to say something during the men's Bible study, but a lump rose up in my throat, choking me so that I couldn't speak. For almost a month, I kept silent, wanting to tell someone how I felt but not daring.

My conversion took place late one night, after a church service. José's nephew wanted to speak with the pastor, and we accompanied him. The men spoke together for a few minutes. After they finished, the pastor asked us to pray with him.

After saying "Amen," he turned and looked at me. I tried to avoid his gaze, looking anywhere but at him, but I couldn't. His eyes seemed to pierce into my heart and discover all the secrets hidden there. "When will you make your decision for Jesus, María?" he asked me. I felt as if a bucket of icy water had been dumped over my head. "Ah . . . I . . ." I stammered. I couldn't speak. My fingers trembled. But slowly I began to open my heart and tell about the doubts and confusion I'd felt.

When I finished, the pastor invited me to pray and tell God just what I had told them. "If you don't know what to say, I'll pray and you can repeat after me," he said.

I bowed my head and prayed, telling God that I repented of my sins and accepted Jesus as my personal Saviour. Then I fell silent and waited for the pastor to continue. "There's nothing left to say," he said. "You said it all!"

After surrendering my life to Christ, my entire being changed in a special way. I felt as if I had entered a different world unknown to me. Now I didn't have to worry about how much effort I put forth or how long I sacrificed myself in doing penance to obtain forgiveness for my sins. Only the blood of Christ could cleanse my soul and blot out my sins. I discovered that all the works I had done to gain salvation were like filthy rags. They would *never* be enough to pay the price of my sins, as Titus 3:5 teaches. Now I have the hope of eternal life in Christ Jesus and the promise of the Holy Spirit who guides me through life.

While this is a true story about real people, their names have been changed for privacy.