

David Alan Hjelle
1 Corinthians 2:2
English 101D
August 30, 1999

All Things Eternal

Little did I know that the summer of 1997 would change my life—redirect my passions, reorganize my priorities, establish life-long commitments, radically affect my world-view, and quite literally rescue me from a certain death. To be more specific, it wasn't the summer that changed my life—it was God Himself.

My growing up years have been full of Biblically-based instruction, teaching, and (on my part) learning. I've attended a solid, Bible-believing church ever since I was four years old. Never can I remember a time when my parents haven't been careful to bring me up under the Lord's instruction and wisdom. Many times have I "prayed the prayer" that all Christians are supposed to. Once, I even recall going forward at a Billy Graham crusade.

I am convinced that I knew Jesus quite personally in my younger years. But, as I began to grow physically and in the number of my commitments, something changed. God is the one who changed me back to someone sincerely interested in following and loving Him.

My sophomore year of high school had just ended. School had been going well. I really enjoyed it. Anyhow, this was going to be a great summer. I'd got my first job, and was ready to work as hard as possible at it. As the summer progressed, I made some new friends. A daughter and twin sons of former missionaries to Africa became good friends, and we often kicked around a soccer ball in the evening hours of June and July.

One of those evenings (one rather early in June), a conversation began. Alyson (the daughter) and I were talking. I'm usually rather quiet and introvert-

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ed, and it had been a long time since I had a really good conversation. That night, I managed to open up, wider than I had in a very long time. We discussed a wide variety of topics, but nothing was quite so revolutionary as when we talked about things eternal, things spiritual. So rarely had I talked with *anyone* about the faith that I claimed to believe. We talked about evil and good; hypocrisy and authenticity; wrong and right; and Satan and God. For one of the first times in my life, I was starting to think about my faith as real—not just something that I got in church on Sundays or that I depended on when I was feeling down. That was good, but it didn't get very far out of its cage—my comfort zone, where I saw myself as practically perfect.

Later in that same summer, I went with my Boy Scout troop to a week-long summer camp. I take that back. I went with *part* of my Boy Scout troop. Most of the guys had decided to attend a camp in South Dakota, but a handful of us decided to attend our usual camp in Park Rapids, Minnesota. My dad was our substitute scoutmaster, and most of the guys were good friends of mine. One of them, named Paul, was an energetic fellow who came up with a rather humorous comment for nearly every situation. He also was a sold-out Christian. He could quote Scripture left and right—and he did, for we often had discussions about religious things. And, he was only a fairly new Christian! I looked at myself and saw one who had claimed Christianity all of my life, but I had never studied Scripture in depth quite like Paul had. That realization stung me, but the annoying pest was soon anesthetized and caged away in the zoos of my brain.

Finally, I went on my first mission trip in the summer of 1997. In Hermosillo, Mexico, I saw people who lived in tar paper houses constructed in the

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town garbage dump. I saw people so poor, so ragged, so needy, and too helpless to really do much about it. Society was cruel, and life seemed oh, so cruel. Why was I so much better off than they? It wasn't fair! But I also saw people in those same conditions who knew Jesus. They weren't down and out—they were truly happy!

Our missions team also visited a prison during our stay. Despite the horrible prison conditions (I distinctly remember the guards hoisting their rifles on their shoulders.), the men who came to the church service were truly joyful, especially when they praised their Jesus. They so deeply wanted to share what they could—even if all they had was cold water and a little bit of Christ's love. I started to see what the world was really like, and how much it—and I—needed a Savior.

The floodgates were open. All of the little pricks of conscience that I had conveniently stored away were loosed. I began to see how sinful I really was. I ran across a verse in James that pointed this out loud and clear. Quite bluntly, the Scriptures state, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." (James 4:17, NIV) How many times had I—and do I still—ignored something that I *know* God wanted me to do? What did Jesus say about believers who are lukewarm, who do not let their faith influence every aspect of their life? He told John to send a letter to the church in Laodicea and to write, "So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth." (Revelation 3:16, NIV) How often was I—and still am I—lukewarm? Finally, I realized the utter depths of the evil in my thought life. Jesus addressed this directly during the Sermon on the mount when He said, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already commit-

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ted adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:28, NIV) As much as I am sometimes loathe to admit it, I am an average teenage guy. Jesus’s words rang convincingly and lovingly into my ears. I began to understand why I, David Alan Hjelle, needed a Savior. I decided that I needed to take what I believe completely seriously.

Christ Jesus has forgiven me. And, He loves me. He has demonstrated this to me so many times. Far more often than not, I fall down. But He is there to pick me up each time when I desperately want to get up. He is my best friend, and I love Him dearly.