

## *The True Story of Robert McCormick*

“Hey Pastor,” said Robert McCormick with a grin. “I would like to discuss something about communion with you.”

“Sure Robert,” I said. “Whenever you are ready.”

“Can we talk about it over a beer?”

“No,” I responded. And this is how the story of Robert began for me. By the grace of God it didn't end that way, but let me fill you in on how it all happened.

Robert McCormick was a classic drunk. As a result of his profuse drinking, he had destroyed his marriage, watched his sons go into foster care, lost jobs, and frequented jails. Now, at the age of fifty, he was living the “good life” in the wooded area that had once been an old asbestos dump. His life consisted of working a few day-labor jobs each week so that he could stay drunk all the time. Life was good in the woods.

We met Robert while feeding the homeless. We were passing out hot dogs from the back of my old pick-up when he cruised up on a bike and said, “What kind of church are you all from?”

We told him our church was Pentecostal, and he said, “Pentecostal eh?” The next day he started attending our services.

Robert was a very likable guy, and he had some qualities that impressed me. He did not beg, and he was willing to work hard. He was also about as loyal as a guy can be. I don't know what attracted him to us, but he simply made our church his home and continued to come faithfully. He even helped me load and unload equipment for services. During one of those loading times, I looked at him and said, “Robert, if you really surrender your life to Christ, within five years your life will be so different that you won't be able to believe it.” He didn't even answer that comment.

Then something happened that we didn't expect. One night, Robert and his friends were out in the woods drinking when one of the guys got upset. He swung a baseball bat at Robert's head. Robert tried to block the blow, but it was too late. The bat glanced off of his arm and hit him between his eye and his temple. He knew he was hurt, but he was still able to walk out of the woods to get help. When he got to the hospital, it was discovered that he had escaped a fatal blow by a fraction of an inch. His eye socket was broken, however, and he was in a lot of pain.

Isn't it interesting how far God will go to get someone's attention. For Robert, that bat to the side of the face was a real wake-up call. As he laid in that hospital bed, he began to really think on God, and before he was released from the hospital, he had surrendered.

Once Robert came out of the hospital, we saw him walking down the street. We pulled over and he filled us in on what had happened. We had lost contact with him during the whole experience. All we knew was that he had been injured. We had been unable to find him. We praised the Lord for allowing us to see him while we drove past. If we hadn't seen him that day, we probably would not know the rest of this story.

Due to his homeless status, Robert was given 6 weeks in a recovery facility. It was about a 45 minute drive from our church, so I made Robert a deal. I said, “If you find a way to get to church, I will take you home.” I found myself doing a lot of driving because of this promise.

During those drives, we had plenty of time to talk. He shared that after his experience in the hospital, he knew drinking was over for him. He said with the sound of regret, “Drinking may be alright for some people, but it is not alright for me.” When the 6 weeks were ending, we did not want

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him to go back into the woods. We felt the influences there would be too much, so we decided to offer him a room in the house we were using for church services. He gladly accepted the offer. After a few months living in the church, Robert found a job and we helped him move into his own apartment. Within only 6 months of our meeting, he was on his own. He worked hard and paid his own bills.

As his faithfulness to church continued, there was a memorable prayer meeting in which my wife asked, “Robert, would you like us to pray for you to stop smoking?”

His response was surprising. “No! The Lord is not convicting me of that!” He said it with such emphasis that we were not sure how to respond, so we just moved on. Within a few weeks, however, he brought up the subject himself by saying, “The Holy Spirit has really been beating me up over these cigarettes. I know it is wrong to smoke, and I know I am going to have to deal with it sooner or later.” Fortunately, it was sooner. He never smoked again after that summer.

As time passed, I remembered my words to Robert: “If you really surrender your life to Christ, within five years your life will be so different that you won't be able to believe it.” In reality it took less than five years. Robert was a changed man and everyone knew it. He lived on his own, kept that job, was sober and smoke free and then it came to his mind to start a ministry.

“Pastor,” he said, “God has done so much for me. I have been thinking about starting a feeding ministry for the homeless. Maybe God can reach out to them like He did to me.” With our encouragement, he started his ministry within a few weeks. He made 20 sack lunches and rode a bus down town to distribute them along with kind words of encouragement. Then one week, he asked me to go along. I watched as this man I had once known as a drunk, homeless, wanderer walked from street to street telling each person he met about the love and power of God. Each conversation he started with a smile saying, “Would you like something to eat?” When they reached out to take the bag from his hand he would warmly say, “So, how is your walk with the Lord?” Some were nice to him. Some were not so nice, but Robert was unchanged by their expressions. Week after week he went to pass out food.

As years have passed, Robert has continued forward. Now, he serves as a deacon in his church. He has re-acquired his driver's license and owns a small pickup truck. He has also made contact with his two sons, one of which has been willing to reunite. Robert even got married, and this year, he and his wife purchased their own home. From homeless to homeowner—all by the power of God. Robert says, “I love Jesus so much and am so grateful for what He has done for me that I could never go back to my old ways.”

What about you? How is your walk with the Lord? Are you tired of doing things your way? Are you tired of the endless cycle? I will say to you the same thing that I said to Robert that hot August Sunday: “If you really surrender your life to Christ, within five years your life will be so different that you won't be able to believe it.” Robert McCormick dared to take Christ at His word. What about you? You can start opening your heart to Jesus right now by praying this prayer.

**Pray:** Father God, I know that I am a sinner. I have done many things to disappoint you. I am tired of living life my way. Please forgive me for my sins and come into my heart and change me. I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross and raised from the dead. I give my life to you. Please save me and be my Lord. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.