



Seasons In Time

ENCOUNTERING GOD FACE TO FACE...
IN OUR BRIEF JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE

Life Season I: My Childhood Years (Continued)

Bad Company, Wrong Friends and God

As the warm summer sun lazily climbed into the South Georgia sky, I was ready for a day of adventure. I was 9 years old and it was 1955...a perfect age and a perfect year for a young boy and his best friend to enjoy the beginning of our school summer vacation. I hopped on my Schwinn bicycle and tightened the strap to my Hopalong Cassidy cowboy hat. With streamers flowing from the handlebars I rode off to town to meet my friend at the Dime Store (things really did sell for 10¢ back then). That's where we would replenish our supply of BBs for a day of shooting at birds (which we rarely hit). As we walked down the store aisles looking for our treasure, *I was horrified to see my friend stuff four packs of BBs in his pockets.* "Come on," he chided, "Grab some and let's get out of here! They'll never know the difference." With my heart pounding and eyes as big as saucers, I blindly followed his command. Just as we stepped outside the door, it happened. Two gigantic hands grabbed our skinny little arms and jerked us back in the store. "I got you, you little thieves! I'm going to call the police, your parents and the school principle. You're going to be in BIG Trouble now!" *There I stood, squalling like a baby, guilty as a dog and waiting for the firing squad!*

Birds of a Feather Flock Together. That's what my mother used to tell me when I was a little girl. Now that I've almost ruined my life, I know what she was desperately trying to tell me. My father died before I was 2 years old and because my mother worked two jobs, I was left to myself much of the time. By the time I turned 11, I was hanging with my older cousin who had "exciting" ideas. I guess I felt that my "goodie-two-shoes" friends were just boring. I wanted to have fun and live life to its fullest. That's where I learned to cuss, smoke, drink and experiment with drugs. During one weekend when I was staying with my cousin and her friends, I was changed forever. *My teenage cousin, that I had idolized, died from an overdose. With police and paramedics swarming around me, I was loaded in an ambulance and taken to the ER.*



The Lord is constantly aware of us and loves us, even when we sin. He knows who our friends are and the influence they have over our lives. *One of the best things that can ever happen to us when we're walking in the wrong direction is to get caught.* God's word says it like this: "I used to wander off until You disciplined me, but now I closely follow Your word." - Ps. 119:67 (NLT). If we would just listen and not rebel, He's teaching us to share in His holiness (Heb. 12:5-13)! *Look how getting caught changed these two people's lives:*

I guess the storeowner saw how scared I was and felt compassion for my youthful stupidity. So, he let us go. Like escaping animals, we raced away as fast as we could. He never called the police, my parents or the principal. *Now that I think back on that day 60 years ago, I know it was the Lord, working through the storeowner, who I came face to face with.* That experience changed my life forever. I never even thought about stealing again. So, what happened to my friend? Apparently he thought he outsmarted the system. He lived a life of crime and spent time in prison (several times)! *For him, our Season with God was meaningless (Ps. 36:1-4).*

When I woke up, I was in an intensive care hospital room. Mother was sitting by my bed softly crying and our pastor was on the other side whispering a prayer. A week later I attended my cousin's funeral. As the soloist sang, "Amazing Grace...I once was lost, but now am found; was blind, but now I see," I came face to face with God. I knew He had spared my life for a purpose beyond anything I could imagine. From that day until now, I have a new set of friends who are on the right track with God. No, I didn't go to seminary or become a pastor when I grew up. But I love God and volunteer working with children at church. *I married, have a wonderful family and never stop sharing my story. "Birds of a Feather...Really Do Flock Together."* (Prov. 13:20)

Next: More Stories From My Childhood - Growing Up Angry!

