

***Finding True Freedom in Christ:***  
Nancy Holman



Like any teenager, the dream of my life was to have a family and home of my own. I attended public school during the week and catechism class on Saturdays. A Franciscan Order of sisters taught the catechism and one sister in particular played an important part in my life. She invited me to join her in celebrating her twenty-five years of dedication. Little did I know that this was a fork in the road that would bring about radical changes in my life.

**Convent Boarding School**

I attended that celebration and my life took a different turn that day when I sensed God saying, “Come follow Me.” I thought God was calling me to become a nun, so I completed my high school years at the convent boarding school and began preparation for a life of service to the King of Heaven.

**From Certainty to Uncertainty**

For a while the conviction that God had called me helped me overcome the doubt and obstacles that I faced in this new life. As time went by, however, my eyes and heart were opened to the futility of rote prayers and rituals. I questioned my sinfulness and the sinfulness of all of us nuns who were supposed to be so holy. The door to freedom would often swing open, but across the threshold uncertainty was written. Each choice to leave or decision to stay caused me wrenching pain and great sorrow.

On one occasion, I had made the decision to leave when the former president of the order and a sister friend of mine, asked me if I was absolutely certain this was the right decision. My response was a flood of tears, as I felt unsure about God’s will for me. I resigned myself to stay, supposing it must be God’s will.

**Ministry in the Mississippi Delta**

Then God led me into a ministry among the poor in the Mississippi Delta. On my flight to Mississippi, viewing the small patchwork fields from the vantage of the sky, made them truly seem like God's country. In the Delta, I saw first-hand what faith was as I observed the lives of God's people. One preacher who was in his nineties struck me by his vast knowledge of the Bible by heart. As his human eyes grew dim, remembrance of the Lord's Word was like music and balm to his soul. He took great joy and delight in praising the Lord for all His goodness and looked forward to their special union at death. His assurance of being with Jesus made all in life worthwhile to him. It was a puzzle to me how he could be certain that his eternity was secure.

An elderly woman shared her daily prayer with us. "Each time I awake to a new day, I thank the Lord that the four walls of my room were not the walls of my coffin and that these sheets upon my bed were not my winding cloth and thank the Lord for the gift of another day." Such faith was unfamiliar to me. If I had been in her position, my heart would not have praised God, but blamed Him for my circumstances. Where was this well that satisfied thirst?

At times I found myself complaining about the weather, too hot, too much rain, too cold, and on and on. I was brought face to face with my sin and told not to say such things because all comes from God. He gives us everything in His perfect time and amount, for He is Master.

Being drawn to the vital faith of the people, I asked them to share with me. Having used a rote meal prayer, I inquired what was said in their silence with bowed heads before eating. They thanked God and praised Him for the bounty brought before them; an expression of their solid rock faith in God Who fed them daily. Often tried by the fires of prejudice and injustice, they evidenced strength steeled by God's Word and His promises. The Mississippi Delta people may have been poor materially, but I discovered that I was the one who was poor spiritually.

### **Leaving the Convent**

During the next thirteen to fourteen years, I struggled with the realization that I was a prisoner, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. I came to realize that I was trying to live up to human expectations. God had a different design for my life.

College opened my eyes to the fact that there were two very different sides to my personality. One played a role and the other was free-spirited. One day in particular while returning to the motherhouse in Tiffin, Ohio, I had a picture come to mind of going back to be caged up again.

When I went apartment hunting after graduation, I began separating from the idea that another authority needed to be making this decision for me. I knew for the first time that I could no longer be obedient to a code of law or to my vow of obedience. Soon after this realization, I told those in charge that I had to leave with no turning back. Finally, at the age of forty-eight, I walked out into the world as fresh and naive as a teenager.

God led me all the way, confirming after each step of faith I took. The day I moved into the apartment is the day I received Christ as my Savior. Peace like a river flooded over me. There was a freedom in new life that only Christ could offer.

### **The Meaning of Salvation**

Once I told the sisters in my small community, I had a deep sense of loss. With feelings of being stripped bare, I woke crying that night. My tears became tears of relief as God gave me assurance in my decision that I did not need to punish myself any more, trying to make up for my faults and sins. Jesus Christ had fully paid for my sins. Though I did not understand it at the time, He was preparing me for my next step of faith, which would involve turning away from my birth faith, Roman Catholicism, and depending on Him alone.

### **Learning the Word of God**

Each time I read the Bible and heard the Word preached, it was as if the Lord opened my ears for the first time to His message. For the first time, I knew God's will for my life and did not need to search for it. Daily Bible reading, from Genesis to Revelation, laid out a complete picture of God's plan for me. By God's grace I was able to comprehend and grow in response to His marvelous message.

I did not have any idea of what was ahead, but God did. After leaving financial and job security, companionship, friends and thirty years of trying to find joy, He did not leave me orphaned. Little did I know then that a seemingly unimportant decision to accept an invitation to go from my apartment complex pool to a ladies' swim party would again change the direction of my life. Here I met a preacher's wife named Millie who clearly presented from Scripture the work of God in a person who calls upon the name of the Lord.

Having been taught to confess my sins, Roman 3: 10 which says, "*There is none righteous, no, not one*", was no surprise to me. Nor was I surprised to learn that I deserved death because I was a sinner, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord*" (Romans 6:23). All my life, the picture of Jesus hanging on the cross had been engraved in my mind, emphasizing the price He paid for my sins. Every Good Friday I had celebrated this event faithfully. Suddenly that picture came alive for me, "*God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8).

What I had not known before or heard read in the Scriptures was Romans 10:13, "*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" I did not know that heaven and eternal life with God was His gift through Jesus Christ. All that was necessary was to believe and accept the truth of the Gospel that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again (Corinthians 15:3-4) and to trust in Jesus alone for my salvation. What joy there was in understanding that I did not need to punish myself anymore! Tears flowed abundantly as I embraced the freedom that only Christ can give.

### **The Lord Provides**

Millie Hobbins, the pastor's wife, became my friend and encourager, answering my many questions, guiding me and patiently putting up with me. Pastor fed me with the Word of God, teaching me that I needed to be daily nourished by the truth of the Scriptures. The church congregation at Lewis Avenue Baptist Church in Temperance, Michigan, helped me through this transitional period. The Lord had provided all that I needed to understand the gift of salvation and begin living as a believer.

My apartment manager, Bessie, had also become my friend. I was very nervous and unsure of myself, as it was the first time in my life that I had to make my own choices for things as simple as what kind of toothpaste to buy. No one was telling me what to do or when to do it! Bessie helped me settle into my apartment and she was the one who invited me to the swim party where I met Millie. When she

informed me a week later that her car had broken down, making it impossible for her to get to church, I volunteered to take her. Little did I know what that day would bring.

### **Blessed Assurance**

Truth rang like a bell that Sunday in the preaching and teaching. I was convicted to make a public testimony of what Christ had done in my life. The pastor's wife had stopped by my apartment for a visit the day before and planted a seed about baptism. Although I was not really listening then, God used her to prepare me for the next step. In obedience to God's Word, I returned to church that night to publicly profess my faith through believer's baptism.

What a change has come into my life! No longer am I tormented with doubt as to whether or not I am praying right or whether God hears me. From reading the Bible and hearing the preaching of the Word of God, I know how to pray. God's will for my life is also not something about which I worry. I know He wants me to spread the Good News about salvation to everyone I can. I have learned that forgiveness is necessary for cleansing and to be open to His direction in my life. Stories of how God has worked in the lives of others, especially missionaries, have been a tremendous encouragement.

With God's help and the willingness to be obedient, I can grow in Him and be His disciple. There is excitement in the many truths and promises that are being opened up to me.

I praise God for His faithfulness in dealing with me!