

I grew up in rural Missouri in a small town called Rolla. I am the youngest of four and came from a good family that loved me very much. My first life changing event happened when I was 14 years old. I stood on my first skateboard and from that day the world around me evaporated and all my energy was focused on this toy with 4 wheels. I spent every free hour just riding back in fourth in front of my house. Skating was my lifeline to a world much bigger than the confines of my small town.

I remember my dedication increased after I watched my first skateboard movie "Gleaming the Cube" and witnessed Rodney Mullen's command of the skateboard. I didn't know anything about freestyle skating but knew I wanted to skate like him. I then decided to spend four hours everyday learning new tricks.

All of my friends at the time were not nearly as committed. They would skate, get high, go to parties, get with girls, and all the stupid stuff you do when your young - then they would quit. I thought that if I had time for parties on Friday and Saturday nights, then I had time to skate and learn more tricks. I am happy to say that skating kept me away from any serious trouble. I never used drugs, drank, or even smoked a cigarette because in my mind that would slow me down and make me lazy. I was becoming an outcast in school, a loner dedicated to my craft...freestyle skateboarding.

The second life changing event happened my sophomore year in high school. I was introduced to Jesus and the Christian faith for the first time at my lunch table. I didn't grow up in a church home and didn't believe that some hippie looking guy (Jesus) I saw in a picture frame could change lives...especially mine. There was this senior named Eddie who carried his Bible to school everyday. He sat across from me at the lunch table and would tell me and my friends how God loved us, how He would forgive us if we just made Jesus our Lord and Savior, and that God has a perfect plan for us.

All we heard was, "Blah, blah, blah." Let me just say that Eddie was not accepted by any group or click in school, and we definitely couldn't figure out why he sat by a bunch of misfit skaters. We would tease him, spit in his food, and cuss him out, but Eddie kept coming back to our lunch table, talking about God's love. I believe he was what a Christian should be...full of love no matter what.

I had two years left in high school and not a clue what I was going to do after I graduated. I continued skating even harder and before I knew it school was over and the real world was beginning. So I took a job on the county highway department holding a stop sign and shoveling asphalt.

One night while I was watching TV, I saw one of those TV preachers. I sat and listened to him, and at the end of his message he said, "Give your life to God and make Jesus your personal Lord and Savior." He went on to say how it was a free gift and how God had a purpose for life. I needed a purpose and was stoked if it was free. So I bowed my head and repeated the words off of the TV. I lifted my head after praying and nothing happened. I wasn't changed. I didn't feel any different. I was bummed God had let me down again... I later went downstairs to my bedroom and prayed the most direct prayer of my life. "God if you are what others say you are I want to know the real you, not religion but the real and loving God."

The next two months were the worst of my life. I was in a deep dark depression that was digging me deeper and deeper into a black hole. I was feeling bad for all the bad things I had done. I thought weird things like, "Everyone has had sex, everyone has stolen, lied, cheated, been selfish...why am I feeling bad about this stuff?" All of these things were crashing on me at once and suicide became a daily thought. I was so ashamed of myself...then I hit rock bottom. It was a Wednesday night; I got into my car and went to a church. I was going to give God one last chance.

I sat in the back of the church and tried to grasp all of what the pastor was saying. It sounded like Chinese to me. But at the end of his message he said, "If you are here tonight and you do not know God, I am going to ask you to come down front." I got up out of my seat and went to the front on the far left and raised my hands toward the ceiling (just like I saw on TV).

The pastor came over and he asked me to pray this prayer and make Jesus the lord of my life. I prayed, "Jesus, I am a sinner." At that moment I knew I had been forgiven. I knew that it was sin I was feeling bad about the last couple of months and I recognized what Jesus did on the cross. I continued that prayer, "I believe you died on the cross for my sins Jesus, I ask you to come into my heart." "I confess you are Lord and you were raised from the dead." I remember crying tears of joy and being so excited that I

started hugging everyone around me. When I did, I ended up hugging Eddie, the dude from high school who first shared God's love to me, some four years earlier.

I was ready to tell the world about Jesus and how He changed my life. That night the pastor told me that the gifts God has given me would not be wasted.

I look back on the time after that first sincere prayer I had prayed – when I asked God to become real to me – and I believe God allowed me to go through two months of being broken apart so He could put me back together by His Holy Spirit so I would never be able to deny Him and His saving grace.

Today God has blessed my talents and I am one of the top freestyle skateboarders in the world. I also work with one of the largest ministries in the world as an evangelist and make a living doing what I love to do.

My life is not perfect and has its ups and downs, but as for my wife and I, we rest in God's love and grace – where life and true happiness is.