



continuous conversion

"I don't know how I know, I know just know, that's all"

by Sara Tusek

In Barack Obama's *Dreams from my Father*, Barack tells his friend and co-activist Johnnie that he's been accepted at Harvard Law School and is leaving his community organizer job in Chicago. Johnnie is not surprised. Barack wants to know how Johnnie knew about this decision before Barack had even made it. Johnnie's reply? "I don't know how I know, I just know, that's all."

Faith and knowing

This sentence expresses how I feel about my faith in God, and my knowledge that Jesus is His son. When I try to rationally explain or justify my faith, I feel false to my very roots.

There is a branch of Christian thought known as apologetics, which provides logical arguments and counterarguments concerning the veracity of the Christian story. Practitioners of apologetics marshal reams of proof for the historical existence of the person called Jesus of Nazareth. These people cross-reference secular historians of ancient Rome, calculate calendars and timelines, and prepare carefully-worded treatises involving statistics and probabilities to lend authority to the narrative of Christ.

Apologists are praiseworthy, in that they devote time and intellectual effort to show a

skeptical, materialistic world that Jesus' existence and claims (and those made about Him by his disciples and followers) have a basis in the same type of record as the existence and claims of Julius Caesar or Socrates. But I must say that this approach to Christianity would never have moved me when I was still lost in my sin.



Photo of a snowy wood courtesy Dr. Z. A. Tusek

Blinded by sin

In fact, before I established my adult relationship with Jesus at age 25, my sin had blinded me so thoroughly that my intellectual capacity was used strictly to justify that which I had already decided to do. Any proof of God's existence (and right to control my life) would only have been subverted by my devious mind into a kind of blanket godly approval of my actions.

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“If God is Who these people say He is, surely He approves of my using the intelligence He gave me and would never want to interfere with my decisions. He made me especially smart, so that I can think my way through life,” would be my cunning response to evidence of God’s power. Intellectual proof of God would only strengthen my stubborn pride in my own mind.

A bull’s-eye

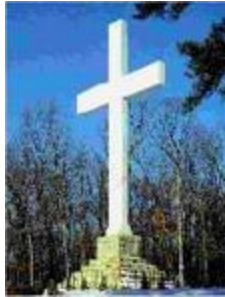
To reach me, God used a different tactic. He appealed to my more vulnerable side, my emotions and desire to be respected by the people I loved. In particular, He used my Grandmother Doyel to exert a gentle, steady pressure to abandon my own will and submit to His.

Grandma Doyel had a tough life, but faced every day with humor and sharp insight. Her faith in Jesus was the bedrock of her strength. She spoke of Him as if He were in the room with us. Her straightforward faith became my constant companion; my on-going question was not WWJD (what would Jesus do?) but WWJTOM (what would Jesus think of me?). Sheer embarrassment and the sickening feeling that I was not living up to the standards I knew perfectly well, given to me through my grandma, kept me from enjoying my sin.

You could say that God aimed at my conscience rather than my cognitive faculties. And He scored a bull’s-eye. After about a decade of living to please my own interests, I was more than ready to trade my freedom to sin for His freedom to be close to Him.

How I know what I know

The truth is, I know who Jesus is because I know Jesus. That’s the only way I can express my experience of being a Christian.



“The Cross” at Sewanee

He chose me, not the other way around. I didn’t listen to a lecture and become intellectually convinced that God exists and Jesus is His son. I didn’t even listen to my own conscience until He, in His loving persistence, made it impossible for me to go on ignoring the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to me through my God-given conscience.

He chose me, and when He did, He revealed Himself to me. This sounds far more melodramatic than it really was. There were no burning lights, no trumpets or kettle drums. Unlike St. John, I didn’t experience an overwhelming revelation of the majesty and power of Christ.

Instead I received just what I needed so badly: the reassurance that God is real, the promise that He will one day eradicate evil because He is good, and the certain knowledge that Jesus is His son in a unique way. Even this knowledge, though, would not have been enough to keep me on the right path.

What really grabbed me about Jesus, and holds me yet today, is that He loves me. He is real to me through the sense I have that He is present to me in all my activities and that He miraculously approves of me as a person, even as He convicts me of my sin. No one else has ever loved me like this—no one else ever could. I know that I know this. And that’s all I need to know.

