

I was playing on a baseball field in the yard of a Presbyterian Church back in the late 70's. A group of kids asked me if I wanted to join them for a spaghetti dinner on Wednesday night. I love food, so of course, I said yes to them. While hanging out eating spaghetti in the church social hall, they asked me if I wanted to come to youth group. So I did. I had a great time and they invited me to attend church on Sunday. My parents were not really religious and we only went to church a few times. So when Sunday came, I jumped on my 10-speed bike and made the two-mile ride to the church. **At the time I did not know it, but this was a 1st chance.** I started to attend morning bible study before church and the next thing I know I was really involved in the youth group, church, and all the various activities. I started meeting with the Pastor to learn more about being baptized as a Presbyterian.

I was baptized on November 1, 1981 at the age of 17. I still remember the drops being poured on my forehead...In the name of the Father...and of the Son...and of the Holy Spirit. My mom was there that day to witness my baptism. I remember the outpouring of emotion as we hugged at the end of the service...it is no coincidence I remember that day...the day I accepted the One who created me into my life for all eternity.

A few years later when I went off to college, I stopped going to church. Did not really think about it much other than the fact that my home church was too far away to attend on a regular basis. I did not really seek out another church where I was going to college. Looking back on it now, I was working on my own agenda and being a wild college student...it did not work out too well...I flunked out of college and eventually moved back home with my parent up in Washington DC at the age of 22.

This is where I met a young lady called Deborah Marie Menold. I just knew she was right for me...she would be a great mother and of course she was very easy on my eyes. I married her in the Catholic Church on Oct. 1, 1988. **At the time I did not know it, but this was a 2nd chance.** I was not catholic but had to go along with the program in order to marry her...so I did. As time went by, she would have to force me to go to church. I would look for all sorts of reasons not to go from being tired, to working on the yard, or whatever I could think up. And every so often I would get off the hook and not have to go...but she went without me anyway. When I did go, I would always delay leaving as long as I could so we would be late and I would always want to leave right after communion so we would not get caught in traffic in the parking lot or have to stand around and

talk to people. After all, football was on at 1 o'clock and I had MY priorities. I was selfish....looking back on it....really selfish!

Then we moved to the Hampton Roads area and actually attended Immaculate Conception for a couple of years. My son was baptized here in April of 1993. Because our neighbors attended Our Lady of Mount Carmel, we eventually started going to church there. I remember telling Debbie that I needed to be involved with the youth group or something if we were going to go to church there. On that very first Sunday, there was an announcement in the bulletin saying they needed help with the Junior Youth Group which was grades 6-8.

At the time I did not know it, but this was a 3rd chance. I became very involved in the Junior Youth Group and decided to start taking RCIA classes to become Catholic...and on April 15, 1995, I did exactly that when I received confirmation and then the Eucharist for the first time.

I was active in the church and went MOST Sundays to Mass, but my spirituality was lacking...my relationship with Jesus. I did not really know Him...I only knew of Him. In 1997, I was invited to attend a retreat called Cursillo. **At the time I did not know it, but this was a 4th chance.** Cursillo is a 3 ½ day weekend that is predominantly focused on evangelization. But it was on that Sunday at the closing Mass that I RECEIVED the Eucharist. That I received the Lord INTO my body. I went back to the pews...and kneeling there...I wept uncontrollably...that moment is etched into my mind.

Moving forward, I continued to be involved in the Youth Group and also in RCIA for the next 10 years. Everything was great in my mind and my faith was growing. In many ways I was like Martha...keeping myself busy with all kinds of things at the church believing that I was making a difference in people's lives. Don't get me wrong, much was happening but God was calling me into something even deeper. This happened during another Cursillo weekend where I was the Rector in June of 2011. **At the time I did not know it, but this was a 5th chance.** We were in adoration and Father Mike was playing the piano and singing and I was kneeling a few feet from the blessed sacrament when I got this overwhelming feeling to be in the Diaconate. I was not that familiar with being a deacon at the time but there it was...the next day we were in silent adoration and I was in the same location and once again I received the same calling. In fact, that night I went to reconciliation and a priest that I had never met asked me if I had ever thought about being in the Diaconate. Then on Sunday, the

team washed my feet which is the symbol of the Diaconate. Needless to say, I am now in the Diaconate program and my prayer life is better, Mass is a miracle every time and there is no way I would ever miss Mass, try to be late or try to leave early. What I have realized is that the all-powerful, ever-living God is present when I am at Mass and I am there to praise and glorify Him.

I have shared some highlights of my personal journey of faith to highlight that God is a God of second, third, fourth, fifth, and however many chances we need. Every chance is an opportunity for conversion. Think about all the stories of second chances, of conversion, that we find in the gospels. As I look back on my journey, each chance has brought me closer to Christ, enriched my understanding of God's will for my life, and left me thinking less of myself. These points of conversion have opened the door for me to not just know of Christ but to know Him more personally.

And as I begin to know Christ more, to experience Him in my everyday life, essentially because I am more aware of Him, He becomes the priority that weaves the fabric of my life from family, to work, to social gatherings and everything I do. I become more aware of the chances the Lord has placed in front of me and I feel compelled to respond.

When I realize how much Christ is surrounding me in my life it reminds me of a prayer by St. Patrick:
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.

I have also noticed that when I put my own priorities aside and make Christ my priority, I have a greater sense of humility and understanding that it is only through Christ that I have the courage to do anything. The more I know Christ, the more I want to get to know him.

So who do I say Jesus is....he is humble...think about it...in the Eucharist, He allows himself to be put in my hands...for me...for my spiritual nourishment...so that I may go out in become what I receive. The all-powerful and ever-living God is laid out on the altar and then received by us at every Mass...makes me ask myself, how often do I lay myself out so others can receive the gifts that God has blessed me with.

So who do I say Jesus is.... he is sacrifice...we need only to look at the cross...how often do I sacrifice my wants and my desires...how often do I sacrifice my worldly possessions...for the good of others.

So who do I say Jesus is ...he is my big brother...the one I look up to that is always looking out for me...makes me think about who I can be a big brother to in my life.

So who do I say Jesus is ... He is my awesome savior....my example...the love of my life for all eternity.

Close with the Deer Song.

So, as we break out into small groups, let's reflect on the following questions:

Within the gospels, what are some examples of second chances? How might they relate to my life?

Who do I say Jesus is?

What does it mean for Jesus to be my priority? Is He my priority?

Am I amazed and awestruck by Jesus? How?

How do I make myself more available to God?