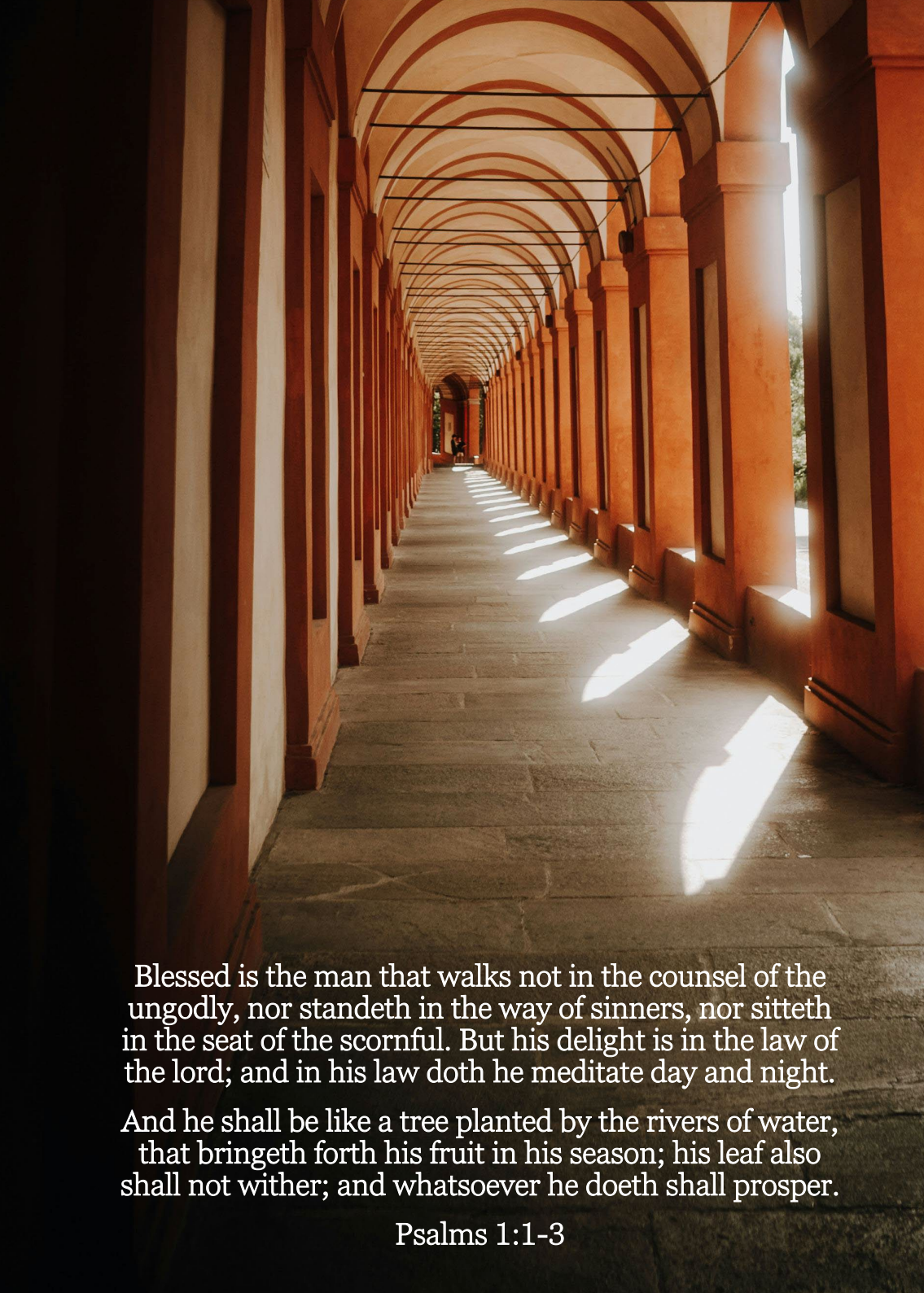


The Testimony of how I came to know the Lord

A young man's walk from Self-Righteousness to Saving Faith



Richard A. Kotey

A photograph of a long, arched corridor with a stone floor. The walls are made of reddish-brown stone or brick, and the ceiling is composed of a series of arches. Sunlight streams in from the right side, creating long, bright shadows on the floor. The perspective is looking down the length of the corridor, which recedes into the distance.

Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the
ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth
in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of
the lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water,
that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also
shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Psalms 1:1-3

Preface

This testimony is an honest account of how God, in His grace, opened my eyes to the reality of my condition – not just as someone who made mistakes, but as a sinner in need of saving. It is the story of how I came to understand that salvation is not earned through good works, moral behaviour, church attendance, or ministry involvement, but is received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

My desire is simple: that by sharing how I came to know the Lord, someone else might examine their own heart and seek Him more deeply. If even one person is led to genuine repentance, true faith, and a clearer understanding of the gospel, then this booklet will have served its purpose.

Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And the same mercy that reached me is available to you.

To God alone be the glory.

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Table of Content

Preface	1
Humble beginnings	3
Early Sins	5
Creeping sins.....	7
Turning point.....	9
Early church life and growth	13

Humble beginnings

I was born on 20th April 1991, the eldest of four children. I grew up mostly in Koforidua¹ where I was born, and moved to Tema², and Accra, often living with my grandmother. My parents were both traders and though they were not financially well-off, they were hardworking and deeply committed to giving us a better life than they had. As a child, I remember my father sold shoes at Rawlings Park³, and my mother sold jewellery at the local market. They worked long hours to provide for us, so much of my childhood was spent in the care of my grandmother.

My grandmother played a significant role in my upbringing. She taught my siblings and I about Christ and His love for His children, often prayed for our wellbeing, and ensured that we attended church regularly. Through her guidance, faith became part of our daily lives. As a child, I was neither particularly troublesome nor exceptionally outstanding. I participated in church activities, including plays, and enjoyed memorising Bible verses. At the time, I knew about God, but I had not yet developed a personal relationship with Him.

We lived in Koforidua for a few years before moving to Tema, and later to Accra when I was about five or six years old. There, I lived with my parents, but they both travelled abroad in search of better opportunities, leaving me in the care of my grandmother; she was the only constant in my upbringing. In Accra, I lived in Mamprobi and began my primary education at St. Martin's Preparatory School, a small school not far from the main Post Office. I attended from Class One to Class Four before we moved to Lartebiokoshie, in another part of Accra.

¹ A town in the eastern region of Ghana

² A suburb of Accra, the capital of Ghana, West Africa.

³ A popular local trading place where people sold on the floor and tabletop.

Around that time, my father had travelled abroad in pursuit of greener pastures. When he secured employment and began earning a stable income, he sent money home and requested that I be enrolled in a better private school. I was then transferred to Seven Great Princes Academy, where I completed my Junior Secondary Education and so did my younger brother and sister.

Early Sins

After my primary education, I went on to study at Okuapemman Secondary School in Akropong in the Eastern Region of Ghana. I later gained admission to the University of Ghana, where I completed my undergraduate studies. After my degree, I undertook my national service at the university, pursued a master's degree, and eventually became a Graduate Teaching Assistant. Later, I got married and moved to the United Kingdom to live with my wife.

But long before these achievements, there was another story unfolding in my heart — the story of sin.

As a child, I was curious and easily influenced. I experimented with many things. Some habits I was able to stop by the grace of God, while others took deeper root. Being mostly under the care of my grandmother meant that although I received love and spiritual guidance, I also learned how to be secretly rebellious. Outwardly, I appeared manageable; inwardly, I was drifting.

At some point, I became disrespectful and rude. I learned to insult, to steal, and to lie. On a few occasions, I experimented with smoking and alcohol, but by God's mercy, those habits did not take hold. I also struggled with a bad temper and often found myself involved in fights. Yet, despite all this, I considered myself a "good" boy. I had convinced myself that I was balanced — not too bad, not too extreme. There was some good in me and only a little bad. After all, I attended church regularly and read my Bible. In my mind, that meant I was right with God — or so I thought.

It was during secondary school that sin began to take deeper root in my life.

Before I left for Okuapemman Secondary School, my grandmother sat me down and spoke to me seriously. She warned me not to follow the wrong friends and encouraged

me to live a disciplined life. She prayed for me and made me memorise the opening verses of Psalm 1:

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the
ungodly...”

She told me to keep those words close to my heart and live by them. I memorised the passage faithfully. But though I knew the words, I did not understand them. I believed in God, but only superficially. I now realise that I was not saved at that time. The Holy Spirit had not yet opened my heart to truly comprehend the depth of God’s Word.

In secondary school, I still thought of myself as a good boy. Compared to others, I felt righteous. In fact, during my three years there, I was punished only once — for being late to morning devotion. I followed the student handbook and obeyed the rules outwardly. Yet inwardly, sin reigned in my heart. I stole on a few occasions, sometimes in retaliation when I felt wronged. I got into fights. I justified my behaviour by telling myself that “everyone does these things.”

But the truth is this: sin had begun to bind me. It was like a garment wrapped tightly around my soul — comfortable, familiar, and unnoticed. I lived outwardly disciplined, yet inwardly enslaved.

As Hebrews 12:1 says, there were “sins which so easily beset” me. And though I did not yet fully understand it, I was walking further away from God while believing I was still close to Him.

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

1 Corinthians 1:18-19

Creeping sins

I lived a simple life in my secondary school days. I had a quiet composure. I was a very good student and pride myself to be among the well-dressed boys in my year group. I enlisted in the school drama group and wrote poems for the school magazine. Because I liked music and had a knack for writing, I wrote and recorded songs (rap music) for the school annual music compilation⁴. During entertainment, we got to perform the songs on stage.

Because of the activities I involved myself with in school, I was somewhat popular and of lot the girls found me attractive. As time went on, this got into my head. I got myself a girlfriend in my first year. It did not take long till we started fornicating. I was 17 by then and this sinful habit continued to my university days.

I stumbled across pornography during my Secondary School days, but it was in university that I had more access to it. On campus, pornography was a normal thing to watch. I had it on my computer and on discs so I could watch it anywhere. By the end of level 100 second semester my girlfriend from secondary school broke up with me and I was devastated. I vowed that if I couldn't get the girl I wanted to be with, I would become a 'player'. True to my words I started living that lifestyle. I will move from one woman to another, from one relationship to another with no serious intentions. The pornography I had been exposed to fueled my drive to fornicate. In all this, I was still seen on the outward by my peers as a good boy. I hardly had issues with anybody. But I was very sinful on the inside.

I still attended church and was active and very much interested in Christian activities. I attended a lot of Christian

⁴ A compilation is an annual collection of rap and RnB music composed and produced by the student body, which is then sold to the students. The student composers get to perform the songs during organized school entertainment sessions.

conferences and shows. I was even a member of Mass theater, a campus Christian group which used Dance, Drama and Poetry to 'minister' the gospel to people. I believed and hoped that being part of such a group meant service to God, so He will look down or be okay with my sins and count me as His child. So, I held on to this belief and continued in my sinful habit.

I was also obsessed with my appearance. I wanted to look the best among my peers - I wanted to stand out - In secondary school, I was pious and neat on the outside. Interestingly, though I wore well ironed uniform outside, my bed was seldom laid, and my trunk (or suitcase) was always in a mess. I also did things to enhance my appearance; I would perm my hair and do all sorts of things to myself to look good. This continued to the university where I aimed to be fashionably dressed on campus. Because my mum lived abroad at the time, it was easier to get cool and fashionable clothes and gadgets. I also invested time and money on shoes that I didn't need. I adored them. I was self-conceited, self-loving and overly concerned about what people thought of me.

I was also covetous. I followed the latest trends in tech gadgets. I changed my phone almost every semester and when I saw a friend with a new device, I wanted it. In so doing, I had totally forgotten the main reason I was in the university and my grades began to fall.

Turning point

In my third year at university, I began to feel that something had to change. At least, I wanted it to change.

A year earlier, I had moved into a new hostel where I shared a room with three other students. One of them was a Christian. He noticed the lifestyle I was living — especially the number of women I brought into the room at odd hours. One day, he called me aside and spoke to me about it. He shared his own story, how he had once lived similarly and how it had affected him. I don't remember the exact words he used, but I remember that I listened.

From that day, I decided to try to turn my life around. I wanted to stop the sinful habits. I wanted to be better.

But that was when I made a shocking discovery: I couldn't.

I am the vine, and ye are the branches: he that abideth in me,
and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without
me ye can do nothing. John 15-5

All along, I believed I was in control. I thought I could stop anytime I wanted — like turning off a switch. I would try to change for a few days, sometimes even a few months. Then I would fall back into the same old lifestyle. I couldn't stay celibate. I couldn't stop watching pornography. I couldn't stop consuming the kind of music that fed my old mindset. No matter how much I tried, I always returned to my old ways.

The church I was attending at the time did not help me understand what was truly happening. I was often told that God understood, that He would forgive me whenever I asked, that I was destined for greatness, that I would be wealthy, that I would be 'the head and not the tail'. So, I held on to that and told myself that as long as I was trying — even if it was half-hearted — I was fine with God. After all, God is loving. He sees my effort. He understands.

So I kept struggling quietly.

Outwardly, nothing seemed wrong. I was calm, composed, and well-behaved in public. No one knew the battle inside me. People still saw me as a good person.

In 2012, during the summer holidays, I had the opportunity to travel to England. At Victoria Coach Station in London, while waiting for my bus to Middlesbrough, I sat next to a Ghanaian man and we began talking. His name was Mr. Ferguson Kcofie. He spoke Ga⁵, which immediately drew my attention. He was simply dressed, very ordinary in appearance — no visible signs that he was a pastor. In hindsight, if he had looked like what I imagined a typical preacher to look like, I might have kept my distance. But he didn't. He was calm, normal, and easy to talk to.

So, we chatted and before we parted, he gave me his card.

When I returned to Ghana, I reached out to him. He invited me to his church.

Meanwhile, back on campus, I had once again made resolutions: I would stop watching pornography. I would stop fornicating. I would live right. For about three months, I managed. Then I fell into sin again. The cycle continued. I was trying to fix myself, but I didn't yet understand that I could not fix myself.

All have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:23-24

The sermons I heard repeatedly declared that God had already fought and won every battle for me, that nothing could harm me, that I could do anything. Yet my reality contradicted what I was hearing. If I was free, why was I still

⁵ A local Ghanaian language.

bound in sin? If the battle was already won in my life, why was I losing?

My conscience had begun to trouble me. Something was not adding up.

I joined a campus prayer group. I attended evening prayers. At one point, I was even pressured into speaking in tongues. Yet, despite all the church activities and repeated “accepting” of Jesus, I remained trapped in sin. The outward expressions were there, but the inward transformation was missing.

Eventually, I honoured Pastor Ferguson’s invitation and attended his church.

The service was solemn — very different from what I was used to. What struck me most was the sermon. It focused on human nature, sin, and salvation. The central message was simple but piercing: we are all sinners, deserving of God’s wrath. No amount of good deeds can erase our sin.

That thought shook me.

I had never truly considered that God’s wrath was upon me. In my mind, God was loving and kind — and He is. But I had never understood that His holiness demands justice. I had believed that being a good person, attending church, participating in ministry, and trying occasionally to improve were enough.

They were not.

I began to understand that the only way to be right with God was not through effort, performance, or religious activity, but through the complete dependence on the finished work of Christ. Good behaviour cannot cancel sin. Religious involvement cannot erase guilt. As long as I was sinful, I was not right with God.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. Romans 5:12

By God's grace, this truth settled deeply in my heart. I began to pray differently. Not as someone entitled to mercy, but as someone unworthy — like the tax collector in Luke 18:10–14 who simply cried, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Through consistent Bible study and God's grace, my understanding grew clearer. Salvation through Christ was no longer a vague idea; it became real and urgent. I began to grasp doctrines I had previously heard but never understood — redemption, justification, sanctification, election. They were no longer religious vocabulary. They became living truths.

Something changed in me.

My conscience became sharper. My desire for truth deepened. My spirit felt awakened. I was no longer trying to manage sin — I was beginning to see it for what it was. And for the first time, I was ready to stand firm, not in my strength, but in God's.

Salvation is by scripture alone, through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone, and for the glory of God alone.

Five solas of salvation.

Early church life and growth

My sins did not disappear overnight. I did not suddenly become a saint. What changed was not that temptation vanished, but that by God's grace I now had strength to fight. This time, I was not relying on myself. Christ became my foundation — my chief cornerstone. I began learning what it truly meant to depend on God, not just in words, but in practice. It was — and still is — a daily learning process.

Through consistent Bible reading, prayer meetings, Sunday services, and guidance from mature Christians, my understanding of God deepened. I began to see more clearly who He is — holy, just, merciful — and who I am before Him. I understood that the Christian life is not about performance, but about worship, obedience, and total surrender. God began to give me a heart that desired to submit to His will.

What is the chief end of man?

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

The early days of walking with the Lord were some of the hardest. Temptations did not reduce; in many ways, they intensified. It felt like a tug of war. I was trying to walk away from sin, but sin was pulling me back. I stumbled many times. There were Sundays I avoided church because I felt ashamed. I knew that sitting under the Word would expose my struggles, and that conviction felt heavy.

But God remained faithful.

I came to understand that His grace truly is sufficient. The Christian life is not a life without struggle. It is a constant battle — against the flesh, against old habits, against the pressures and cares of the world. It requires perseverance. It requires humility. It requires dependence, not on one's self, but wholly on Christ.

Slowly, by God's grace, sin began to lose its grip. The desires that once controlled did not anymore; it started to weaken. I am not sinless, but my relationship with sin has changed. I no longer excuse it or justify it. I hate it. I fight it. And I run to Christ when sin prevails.

What comforts me most is that Christ did not let me go. Despite how far I strayed, He drew me back. And I am grateful that He has received me, not because of my efforts, but because of His mercy.

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. John 16:33

Now, Am I Saved?

Yes — I can say that with confidence.

Not because of my goodness. Not because I turned my life around. Not because I serve in church. But because I have believed in Jesus Christ — in His vicarious atonement and His glorious resurrection.

I believe that He, who is fully God, became fully man. He lived the sinless life I could never live. He bore the punishment for my sins on the cross. And through His death and resurrection, my sins are forgiven and His righteousness is credited to me.

This righteousness is not something I earned. It is not something I deserve. No amount of good behaviour, religious activity, or earthly wealth could ever purchase it. It is a gift of God. And because of this imputed righteousness, I can now approach the throne of God — not in fear of condemnation, but in confidence in Christ.

When Did I Get Saved?

I cannot give you an exact date or time.

But I know this: when I truly believed in Christ and relied on His finished work alone for my salvation, something changed in my heart and soul.

There were fruits.

My desires began to shift. I started enjoying fellowship with the Lord and with other believers. My prayers were no longer centred on what I wanted from God, but on worship and gratitude. I became more receptive to God's word and more humble under His correction. I wanted to be in church — not out of obligation, but because I genuinely longed to be in the house of God.

My love for the things of God grew. I began to value holiness, truth, and obedience. Not perfectly — but sincerely.

This is how I know.

Not because I remember a dramatic moment, but because I see the evidence of God's work in my life. And I continue to depend on His grace daily.

But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lust.

Galatians 5:22-24

This is how far the Lord has brought me. Glory be to His name.

Amen.

This book is not written because I believe my story is extraordinary. It is written because God is merciful.

For many years, I knew about God, attended church, participated in Christian activities, and outwardly appeared to be living a decent life. Yet inwardly, I was struggling with sin, pride, self-righteousness, and a false assurance that I was right with Him. I believed that being "good enough" was sufficient. I believed that effort could substitute for true surrender. I believed that religious activity could cover spiritual emptiness.

I was wrong.

I write this not to glorify my past, nor to present myself as someone who has "arrived," but to magnify the mercy of God. My journey from self-righteousness to saving faith was not instant, dramatic, or without struggle. It was gradual. It was humbling. It exposed the depth of my sin and the greatness of Christ's sacrifice.

If you are reading this and feel trapped in sin, in habits you cannot break...

If you attend church but quietly wrestle with guilt...

If you believe in God but are unsure whether you truly know Him...

If you are trying to fix yourself but keep falling back...

Then I pray this testimony encourages you. The Lord is merciful to all that call upon him in truth.