

# Testimony

From *Real Time*

by George Halitzka

**Running Time:** 6 minutes

**Themes:** Doubt, Unanswered prayer

**Scripture Reference:** John 11:1-44

**Synopsis:** Andrew is a college freshman who's drifted away from the church. At his mother's insistence, he visits his old pastor to explain his reasons for not following Christianity anymore. He ends up relating a painful story of unanswered prayer.

**Cast:**

ANDREW—Age 19

**Setting:** A table in a coffee shop.

**Costumes:** Andrew is dressed like a typical college student—perhaps he wears a stylish T-shirt and jeans.

**Props:**

Small pedestal table  
Two chairs  
Coffee cup

**Author's Note:** It happened to one of my friends during college. "Mary" had been an active member of her youth group, attending church every week and even going on mission trips. But then life got hard: before Mary graduated from high school, her mother lost the ability to walk. Tragically, her church's response was less than compassionate.

By age 21, Mary lost her faith. The bill of goods she'd been sold in youth group didn't match up with the pain of real life.

We all face crises of faith when we realize that the God we thought we'd been trusting doesn't correspond with reality. Then we have to grapple with a difficult decision: whether to adjust our conception of God, and encounter a deity much larger and wilder than we thought possible . . . or to throw out the whole idea of faith. When the "church people" fail to help us along the journey, it's far more likely we'll abandon everything.

In this drama, Andrew experiences a crisis of faith—kind of like my friend Mary. How will his pastor respond to hearing the story? More importantly, how will Andrew come to terms with his own questions?

This one's for "Mary," who wants to believe.

*(As the lights rise, ANDREW walks onto the stage with an air of resignation. He sits down at a table, carrying his coffee cup.)*

ANDREW: You can thank my mom for this. She wouldn't lay off till I came, so . . . let's do it. Then I can get home, and you can—I don't know; read the Bible or whatever you do.

*(A pause as the pastor asks a question.)*

Yeah, I haven't been in a while . . . I guess I'm not into church anymore. I hope this doesn't offend you, but I think Christianity is a benevolent hoax.

*(The pastor says something.)*

The Bible? Yeah, you went to preacher college; guess you have to say that. But what about—have you ever seen a real miracle? You know, where you can't explain . . . not "Praise Jesus; the chemo fixed my cancer." Like, where God was the only hope, and somebody was gonna die, and God swooped down to . . .

*(Pause. ANDREW realizes he's said a bit more than he intended.)*

Look, forget I said . . . I'm sorry. It's just a lot of Christians are fruit-cakes.

On my campus, we have street preachers outside the Union all the time. Yesterday my one o'clock was canceled, so I stopped to listen to this guy.

Long black hair in a ponytail. Hideous red polyester suit . . . like he was from "Pimps for Christ." He starts preaching straight at me: "You need *Jeeesus*, young man! You're dead in sin and hell is real! But come to the cross; you can be *heee*-ulled! Receive eternal life. Let *Jeeesus* light a fire in you!"

*(Pause)*

Yeah, I remember that. In youth group, Pastor Dave talked about "being on fire for *Jeeesus*." I guess that meant closing your eyes and waving your arms while you sang.

I tried it. I mean, junior high is when Dad . . . when he was sick. So I waved with the best of 'em. Did my "daily devotions"; even came Wednesday nights.

*(Pause)*

Do you remember? That night when everybody prayed for Dad? We'd just found out, and me and Mom were crying outside . . . You said God wanted us to "intercede," the whole church. So everybody put our hands on Dad. We all prayed, for like an hour, and it was—power; like something came down on the room. I knew God was there. Dad said he felt the Spirit come inside and . . .

He got better—"heee-ulled." Chemo started working; he came to eighth grade graduation. I told people it was a miracle. Remission free and clear! Praise Jesus, our prayers worked . . .

*(Short pause)*

Until freshman year. Then the doctor checked again, and it was in his lymph nodes.

I know you do a lot of funerals. But do you remember Dad's? The Bible story you read . . . Lazarus, you know? "I am the resurrection and the life," Jesus said.

It kept running in my head, after the funeral: "I am the resurrection and the life." Jesus walks to the graveyard; the tomb where Lazarus is dead and buried. He says, "Lazarus, come forth," and Lazarus does!

It's so dumb . . . I was a freshman, OK? But I knew God had done something; He came down that night we prayed . . . I knew it. So next day, I took my Bible to the cemetery. I made myself believe . . . I stood there, and out loud I said—"Dad, come forth!" I really said . . . "Dad, come forth" . . .

This lady at another grave ran for her car. And that was it.

*(Long pause)*

I'm sorry, Pastor. I was dumb. I mean, a cemetery . . . I just wasn't "on fire" anymore.

I went up to the "Pimps for Christ" man when he was done preaching. I used to believe in eternal life, I said. Might believe it again if something happened. God's all-powerful, he says. Ask and ye shall receive. So I ask Pimp-Boy if he does resurrections—right here; right now. He gets all high and mighty, tells me not to mock God . . .

But I wasn't. I meant it. "Dad, come forth," I said. If it worked . . . I'd be at church right now.

*(Lights out)*

### **Following Up the Drama**

Sometimes, we surrender our lives to Jesus only to watch Him dash our expectations to the ground. Perhaps the only honest response to unanswered prayer is to rage against this all-loving, all-powerful deity who has brought such disappointment and suffering into our lives. Yet in many churches, being that truthful with God is implicitly discouraged. We send

an implied message that asking difficult questions results from a lack of faith, and any doubts that arise are to be hidden lest they infect others.

Perhaps the wisest thing a church can do following this drama is to make it clear that questions for God do not have easy answers . . . but they are welcome in your community. You might encourage people to anonymously submit their doubts in writing to be addressed in an upcoming sermon series. Or you might give them the opportunity to leave their written conundrums at the foot of the cross. In any case, I pray that you will empathize with those experiencing a crisis of faith, and strive to make your church a safe place to bring up hard topics.

Here are some questions you may want to address after a performance of "Testimony":

1. Do you believe God still does miracles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Have you ever experienced what you believe is a miracle in the life of someone you know? On the flip side, has an unanswered prayer (for healing or anything else) ever caused you to question God's care?
2. How did you respond to that unanswered prayer in the long term? Did it cause you to seek God more deeply, or drift away in your relationship with Him?
3. Did your Christian friends support and encourage you in the midst of your questions? Were you able to confide in them, or did it feel like you had to fight your way through the experience alone?
4. What did you find helpful during your crisis of faith? Or if you're experiencing one right now, are there steps you could take to seek God in the midst of it?
5. What would you say to someone like Andrew if he confided his experience of unanswered prayer to you?



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