

I was born and raised in a little town in west Michigan. I was not raised in a Christian household. However, my mom was raised Catholic. This led her to baptize me as an infant in the Catholic Church. She and my dad did not continue to attend church after that.

I started playing the electric guitar when I was 12 years old. By age 13, my goal for my life was to play guitar in a heavy metal band. I always did well in school, but any thoughts of college were overshadowed by a career of heavy metal guitar playing.

By the time I was a sophomore in high school, I tried smoking marijuana one time. During my junior year I began smoking it a few times a week. When I was a senior I was smoking every weekend as well as most days during the week. LSD and psychedelic mushrooms were also introduced to me during my senior year in high school. Marijuana and psychedelics were my drugs of choice. Music and the pursuit of these drugs became the focus of my life.

I continued to play guitar throughout high school with friends in various bands. I also worked in a pizza place. A week or two after graduation in 1994, I quit the pizza place and got a full time job in a factory. My girlfriend continued to work part time in that same pizza place. One evening that July, the owner, Nancy, invited my girlfriend and I over to her house to hang out and play cards. She and her husband were in their mid twenties. It was fairly common for her and her husband to hang out with us and some of the other employees at times. We lived in the same small trailer park as they did, so it was also convenient.

Later that night, the topic of natural disasters, wars, and prophecy came up. Nancy mentioned that the Bible speaks of increasing natural disasters and wars as we get closer to the end of time when Jesus will return to judge us all. I was immediately interested and also a bit fearful. Eventually she shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with me. I said the sinner's prayer and invited Jesus into my heart. I became a Christian then, in July 1994 at age 18, and I felt completely renewed.

The first thought on my heart was to tell my family and friends. I also felt the strong need to turn from my drug use and find the peace, comfort, and joy for which I was looking from Jesus and the Holy Bible. I immediately told my group of friends that I was now a Christian and I no longer smoked pot or took psychedelics. I confessed to them that real meaning and joy in life is not found in drugs, rather it is found in a true relationship with Jesus Christ. They appeared to understand. I did not feel ridiculed, but they still wanted to smoke pot with me. My girlfriend broke up with me 2 months later because I was not willing to get married. This was a major factor in my return to regularly using marijuana.

I was an example of a Christian with no mentors or any form of discipleship or encouragement. I was trying to do it alone. Nancy, my former boss at the pizza place who led me to Christ, was married with a young daughter, so it was not really possible for her to mentor me. Furthermore, her husband was not a practicing Christian.

I tried to be a Christian that smoked pot, used LSD and psychedelic mushrooms, and played in a heavy metal band. I never lost faith in Jesus, and I even bought and occasionally read an NIV study Bible to go along with the King James Bible my grandmother gave me. She lived in Texas, however. So her ability to help me in my faith was difficult. I know she was

praying for me though. I continued to justify my drug use, mostly with the excuse that everyone around me was doing it and that I was not using harder drugs such as cocaine or heroin.

Our band was getting better, and we played a huge outdoor gig with 11 or 12 other fairly well known rock bands from the Grand Rapids, MI area. We had a total of well over 2,000 people attend that camp out and concert weekend. This was July 19 and 20, 1996. I had been a Christian for 2 years. During what should have been a major advancement for our band, I slowly realized that weekend that I no longer wanted to spend my life playing devilish music for drunk and rowdy crowds. Our band broke up after that weekend, and I decided all I could do was try to focus on Jesus and my new job in construction. My marijuana and psychedelic use did not end there. In fact it greatly increased. However, my faith in Jesus Christ continued to slowly grow. Thankfully, God was in pursuit of me. I still prayed and read my Bible from time to time. I was confused and didn't know what to do with my life as a drug using Christian.

Eventually, 2 years later when I was 22, a friend from work invited me to church. I had been thinking of going to church for almost a year at that point. I had absolutely no idea where to start. There were churches everywhere, but how would I know where to go? In January of 1999, I started going to a little church called Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Grandville, MI with my friend from work and his family. I never missed a service and became a member later that summer. I also began to attend Bible Study Fellowship that September. We went verse by verse through the entire book of Romans over the next 9 months, and my life has never been the same. I lost the desire to use psychedelic drugs, and marijuana was no longer ruling my life. The following year I was asked to be a B.S.F. leader. I accepted the leadership role and was surrounded by other Christian Bible study leaders and group members. This was the first time in my life that I had relationships and friendships with other Christian men and women. This made all the difference in the world for me, a Christian trying to follow Jesus Christ on his own.

Then, in August of 2002, I quit my construction job and became a full time student at Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids, MI. I truly felt that my life was finally on the right track, 8 years after giving my heart to Christ. I wanted to fully dedicate my life to serve Christ and His church in what ever way He wanted to use me. I graduated in May of 2006 with a Bachelor's Degree. I majored in Bible/Theology and Cross Cultural Studies. I got married, I found a job in Christian ministry, and we were blessed with a baby girl, Hannah Grace Cook. The name Hannah actually means grace! All praise and honor and glory to our Lord, Jesus Christ. He graciously and mercifully pursued and led me through a life of sex, drugs, and rock and roll in order to glorify His name.

My life as a Christian has not been easy. In fact it has been a battle at times, and I have stumbled. However, I am doing well and am now ready to serve Christ right here, where he has led me. This is great news despite everything not being perfect.

-Chad Cook