

My Transformational Journey from Religious to Spiritual

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Dedication

I dedicate this story to all the people who have asked questions and are searching for answers. Know that God is always with you! And never stop asking. The answers will come.

Acknowledgments

To Danny – God has made sure you were in the beginning – to help me through my circumstances and now in this recent journey. You helped pave the road for its beginning. I find that amazing. I so love you and am grateful we found each other again.

Mikey – Thank you for being that Lion in my life. For keeping determination in the air. You are amazing and I love you.

Anney – You have truly been my butterfly. My fresh beginning and being such an intricate part of me learning to fly again. I so love you.

Jane – Thank you for your acceptance and being that person to talk to about “the crazy things.” I’m so glad you’re in my life.

To all my girls – Thank you for keeping me feeling loved and needed all these years. You are all precious and I love each and every one of you.

Last but certainly not least to my sister Elizabeth – Thank you for the hours spent dancing our bhakti dance. Our connection is so amazing because it has brought so much clarity. I love you so much.

My Transformational Journey from Religious to Spiritual

My soul chose a very strange path, indeed. If my human mind would have had anything to do with it then I would not be here right now writing this particular story.

I would be writing about how amazing it is waking up to the sounds of waterfalls, the view from the top of my mountain and how incredible it is raising a family there. However, my name is not Livy Walton, and that is not my story.

My story begins in 1970, being born to two amazing people. I know that my mom and dad were amazing through stories I heard, and how my heart feels, but not from experiencing them. See, there were many situations in my early childhood that took away the ability to grow up with them. I truly believe that if I had have grown up with my mom and dad that I would have lived a spiritual life from day one.

I also believe that my soul chose this life for me so I could learn, grow and experience both sides and be able to relate to a very special group of people. I do not believe there is a right or wrong path – only the path your soul chooses, with its only intention to live eternity with God. And so my journey begins.

I was born in St. Petersburg, Florida, but was raised in Jacksonville, Florida. I was around four when we moved there. We lived in an apartment complex that rested on the banks of the St. Johns River. It was beautiful. Now let me explain the word “we”.

I am going to change the name of my keepers to Ahab and Jezebel. One, to protect their memory for those lives that they touched in a positive way; and also if you know who Ahab and Jezebel are it fits them to a tee.

My male keeper was a small man in stature and even smaller on the inside. He was weak and timid and allowed his life to be dictated by Jezebel, which brings me to her. She was controlling, dominating and just a plain out bully. We were what I would call holiday church goers. You got it. Every holiday around the calendar we would get dressed in our pretties and show up with our functional family hats on.

After a couple years of doing that we graduated into Wednesday nights. I loved it. I was in a program called GA's – Girls In Action. With going more consistently I started learning about Jesus. He seemed like a really cool guy. I really liked him. Another thing I loved about our church life being more consistent was that my keepers treated me so good when we were there. I felt safe, happy, loved and a part of a family. I loved this feeling so much that I

talked my keepers into letting me join the children's choir. With the help of my teacher they said yes.

Now we were going on Sundays, I went back for Sunday night, as well as Wednesdays. This went on for years, until we moved when I was eleven. Moving? What do you mean moving? I felt like my world was caving in around me. I was going to lose my river, my best friend Danny, and my two chances a week to pretend I had an amazing loving family. And yep, that is exactly what happened. We traded the river for railroad tracks, a close friend for loneliness, and our church for emptiness.

I was a slave to my keepers and sworn to secrecy. Jezebel was the ringleader with her demands of high expectations, and Ahab would follow through with the force on her command to let me know loud and clear that I would never be good enough.

Now I am 13 years old and my world was rocked again. My grandmother was down visiting and I was told we were going to the beach to collect shells. Oh, yes! I got my water back! I was so excited! On the way there we made a pit stop for Ahab. See, he was an architect and inspected buildings for a living to make sure they were all up to par according to the state. Jezebel went in with him.

I thought that was strange but I didn't care, me and Grandma waited outside in the car. We were laughing and having a nice time when these two men in white coats opened the back door and asked me to come with them. Now I was really confused. I told them, "No thank you," I was going to stay with my Grandma.

I grabbed onto her arm. She patted my hand and said, "Why don't you go with them Sweetie, they can help you." What?! Help me? What did I need help with? I made good grades in school, I had reached a level of meeting Jezebel's expectations to a point that I was only getting a beating every other week or so. Sometimes I would go for a month whip free. I had figured out a way to control the chaos. Nope, I'm good. No help needed for me.

Then Ahab came and stood behind them. He looked at me and said, "Let's go!" So the next five minutes or so were filled with high sound levels, four very strong hands, lots of tears, and it all ended with me walking (not freely), through a set of double doors. Come to find out, this was a drug rehab facility. At school we had learned about pills and the dangers of them. Say no to drugs; wear red all week, that kind of thing. Okay, I'm good. So why am I here giving blood, peeing in a cup and being asked questions that I know nothing about?

Then I'm constantly told to stop lying, this was a safe place and they were here to help me. Help me with what? I still don't get it! Well, I slept that night in a detox room with people on both sides of me banging and screaming things that led me to believe they understood a lot better than I did why they were here. I had learned to pray years before and figured this would be a good time to start doing it again.

The next two weeks of my life were spent here listening to the staff talking about God, changing the things I could, accepting the things I couldn't, and the wisdom to know the difference. I heard stories from others that actually made my life seem not so bad. I was not liked very well by the other patients because they knew that I could not relate. The help that I needed was not offered here. Roughly 13 days later the results of my blood tests, urine tests, doctors and staff had convinced my keepers that I didn't belong here. So Ahab came and picked me up.

I think for one of the first times in my life I was actually happy to be going home. I guess prayer really does work. As I was looking out the window I started to realize "Uh, this is not the way home, what is going on?" We pulled into Baptist Hospital. Who is sick?, I wondered. Ahab and I got into an elevator. When we got to our floor and the doors opened, low and behold there was Jezebel. You have got to be kidding me, what's going on now? After an hour session with a counselor and a few signatures later I was now a resident of Baptist Hospital Psychiatric Ward.

Here we go again. I became very quiet. I did not speak for the first week and just followed commands. I did everything I was supposed to do – made my bed, cleaned my dishes, sat in groups and listened to tons of stories from my neighbors of things they had done and their experiences that landed them here in our communal prison.

I was raging inside. Okay, I thought. I will deserve to be here just like everyone else. No more being an outcast for me! So I let the rage come out and be heard. I ripped the curtains off my windows, started knocking over chairs – and this was just the beginning. I don't really remember all the details, but it ended with me in solitary confinement for 72 hours on suicide watch.

My new home was a cold room in white with a mattress on the floor in the corner, and nothing but my thoughts and emotions to keep me company. I just didn't understand. I kept all the commands my keepers placed on me, tried to speak the words they wanted to hear, and kept all the secrets of what went on inside the walls we called our home that they forbid me to ever speak of. In that 72 hours I had processed that at least the cuts and bruises had healed over the past three weeks, and I didn't like all the anger I was feeling.

In the midst of my confusion and longing to know what my future held for me, I had this strange feeling of safety and compassion in the midst of these strangers that I now lived with. They listened to me and truly seemed to care. I had had more conversations with God in this short period of time than I'd had in a while. I felt as if He was with me and I was beginning a new journey. And I was ready!

The next two months were filled with frustration, anxiety, determination and a new direction for my life. I saw my keepers about once a week in a cold room with a mediator. As each week passed I felt like I had more strength and the shackles that they had placed on me were loosening.

After my two months were up there was a decision made for my life that I did not know about. My bags were packed and I was sad to leave this support system that I had come to love and lean on. This was the place on my journey where I had gained strength and come to the realization that my keepers did not have the love for me that I needed, and I was nervous with the thought of going back into my prison and wondering how it would function now.

Well Ahab was here again to transport me somewhere, and I really was not sure where. I was very quiet in the car wondering if I was going home or to another short term place that would fulfill my keepers' wish to not have me in their world. We turned onto a beautiful piece of property with many houses sitting neighborly next to each other, amongst tons of beautiful trees blowing in the wind with a welcoming sway.

More papers were signed and the introductions began with people who would now become my new full time keepers. I did not understand why Ahab and Jezebel refused for me to go back home, but I was strangely okay with it. The journey with them ended with an embrace between me and Ahab as if we were telling each other that we were starting a new journey without each other, and it was alright.

He drove off, and so began my new life as a resident of Baptist Home for Children. I was in the presence of people who were happy to have the job of loving the unloved and bringing security to the insecure. I really wrestled with the feeling of this is where I should be; and feeling like they were just glorified trash collectors bringing in the trash.

Now do you remember me saying this was "Baptist" Home for Children? Yep, you got it. Church, church and more church. I lived there for five years and within that time grew to love and adore this man named Jesus that loved even a wretch like me. That's right. I'm a wretch, filled with sin that had now been washed in the soul cleansing blood of Jesus my Savior.

I had grown very accustomed to the thought that I was not good enough to just be loved for me, that I had to do a service (getting saved) in order for acceptance and love to flow. I was okay with that because this service that I had performed made me a shoe-in for my ultimate home called heaven. A place where there is no pain, no sorrow, pearly gates, gold streets and a home built just for me. I guess that's why he was a carpenter.

No one had ever sacrificed anything for me, let alone their life. Yep! Jesus was definitely worth my time, and my time was what he got, and plenty of it. Praying every day, check. Learning the God inspired holy word, check. Being of service to others, check. Sunday school every week, check. Vacation bible school every summer, check. And singing my praises and worship to him, check and check. That was my favorite. However, the more I got involved, the more I learned, the more questions I had.

By one person I was told that the answers to my questions would come in time. I was told by another that if I had enough faith I wouldn't have all these questions. Uh, okay, faith. Just accept it is what it is and it will be what it will be. Oh boy, right back to change what you can change, accept the things you can't, and the wisdom to know the difference. Okay, got it. This went on for years but the questions didn't go away.

- Why is God so big until he stands next to Jesus?
- Why is Jesus the only way to God when God is the Almighty Creator?
- Why does it take so much pain and sorrow (Jesus' crucifixion) to get to the ultimate goal (heaven)?
- Why do I have to look a certain way to represent Christianity? No tattoos, natural hair color, no outrageous self-expression.
- Why did the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent God create humans that were going to go to hell?
- Why would He allow free will to separate us from him?

Why are there no answers to my questions? I figured the one person who would have these answers would be God himself. So my prayer life got a little more intense. Well, let's be honest, a lot more intense. Seek and ye shall find, they say. Okay, here goes.

Let's fast forward. I am now 22. I've been through college, I'm about to get married, and I have graced the doorsteps of many different religious institutions searching for the golden ticket. Well it worked on Willy Wonka, why not for me? Within that year my vows were said, and I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. Did I mention I had him 3 months early? He came into this world at 2 pounds 9 ounces fighting for his life. What gives?

I figured that I had already paid my penance and things would be smooth from here on out. Nope, wrong again. After eleven weeks of my son proving how strong he was, he was now ready to come home. Halleluiah! Five months after having him home, the heart monitor was gone and he was now sleeping in the bassinet instead of on my chest.

So my husband and I decided we would move from Florida to Colorado. This was frightening and exciting at the same time. Florida had given me bad juju and I was ready to leave it all behind. Why Colorado you ask? Well I'll tell you. I had kept in contact with a set of house parents from the home and they moved to Colorado when Mikey (my son) was six months old. They had been a huge support system for me getting out on my own and continued to be that place that I could go to on Thanksgiving and Christmas and share my life with.

They were my new family and weren't even paid to stay interested in me, they just were. They taught me what love was and I was very grateful. So now they're gone? Oh no, I'm not having that! So we followed. I was very grateful that my husband went along with the idea. I quit my job, we left our pretty home, and started our new adventure.

When we got to Colorado it really felt like a new beginning. We were introduced to the staff and owners of the new girl's home that my family now worked for. We decided to go to their church with them and I loved it. See the girls and staff all went to the same church. The church was like an extension of the home because they were both owned by the same people. This allowed me to start beautiful relationships with young girls going on a journey that I had already been on. I understood their fears, questions, and their language.

Two months after we got there I was offered a job by the owner. Dorothy had recognized that I had something she wanted to give these girls – someone who understood both sides of the coin – someone to guide them on this journey with a greater knowledge that only comes with experience. Yep, that's me! So here I was again: chore lists, high expectations, and church, church, church. I went with what I knew and continued to search for what I didn't – answers to my forbidden questions.

The season of this particular journey lasted for four years. In that time I was completely blessed being a Mom to many young girls. To this day I still keep in contact with quite a few and I am 44. In that four years I found myself learning more about God and Jesus, but not growing closer because of my questions. Why wasn't my faith quenching the thirst I had (which would alleviate the need to have answers to my questions)? This made me doubt my walk and the ability to get in touch with the Moses inside of me to lead the people to the promised land.

From 1998 to 2000 my little family traveled back to Florida for a year, then back to Colorado for a year, and then back to Florida where we stayed. My foster family traveled back with us the last time. We found a wonderful little church with down home people. This felt so good. I became super involved because this is where I was truly happy.

But I started to notice that my childhood had started to repeat itself. My marriage seemed better at church. We were a team and we were involved in any program we could get our hands onto. Our communication came easier. We were also involved in our own things as well. But the more involved I got, the more rules that had to be followed, and the higher the expectations came for perfection. My perfection. My husband and I were not truly happy in our own walls and it seemed we needed more distractions (church), to continue adding numbers onto our goal of staying together forever.

In 2003 I gave birth to a beautiful little girl. She really got me to thinking. Why isn't prayer fixing things? Why can't my husband and I truly be happy together? We know the bible, we are at church all the time, we go through all the motions. Why isn't it changing things? Is this what I want to teach my daughter? Live a life where happiness is a struggle as long as you are following the letter of the law. NO! This is NOT okay! So after 13 years of marriage my husband and I parted ways but continued in our partnership of being parents.

It took a few years to see, but it was the right thing to do. We both have moved on and have found happiness. During this process I had supporters and non-supporters. I started

becoming less involved in church because I was ashamed. I still loved Jesus immensely, but was no longer the poster child for Christianity. Now I had the big “D” on my forehead and I was still asking questions that no one had answers for.

Finally in 2011 I had made up my mind. I wanted to know why I believed what I believed. Was it because this was the only way? Or was it because generations of humans had made this way law and God really had another way? So I left the church. That’s right, I walked away.

See, me and God had a very serious conversation and I wanted him to teach me and guide me. I had used the walls of the church as an escaping mechanism for long enough. Now it was time to get down and dirty and get to the meat and potatoes of it all. I told God that I wanted a fresh slate. I would have no preconceived ideas about anything. I was now Cissy McClinton, believer that there is a God and he is the Almighty Creator. That’s it!

I have to tell you it was not easy starting from square-one, but I wanted everything new to be just that, new. My new desire was to be taught by Him and Him alone. I knew that I would be reading books, watching documentaries, surfing the web and all this is man’s influence, right? So my new constant prayer was: “Lord, if this is for me make it feel right. If this is not, show me.” And boy did he stay true to that!

I have to kind of get away from my story for a moment and tell you something. Yes, that’s right, I’m talking to you. Make your journey your own. Completely be open to what God has for you. He knows your path better than anyone. If the masses believe something, don’t make it yours just for that reason. Ask Him to show you. Then if it feels right it’s yours. If it doesn’t, leave it and move on. Now remember, if it’s not right for you, that’s okay, but don’t leave it with judgment. Remember, everyone is on their own journey so just because it’s not right for you doesn’t mean it’s not right for someone. This really gets rid of judgment and seeing things as one against the other.

This was huge for me. Remember, I was the God fearing, Jesus following, bible totin’, good news spreadin’, being at church every time the doors open kinda girl. In my world this created a lot of judgment towards others. God doesn’t want this. He is nothing but love, patience, tolerance and acceptance. He is also the Mac Daddy troop leader that will help you to create your new reality. So just always keep the phone lines open. He’ll let you know. Okay, back to the story.

I think the first three years of my journey was spent getting rid of things so I would have lots of room for rebuilding. I did learn new things in this time but it seemed I was learning new attitudes to get rid of the old ones. I learned that we are all connected so it truly matters how I treat others. Don’t make judgment over where someone is in their life – you don’t know where they are on their own journey. The human eye sees things much differently than the spiritual eye does.

WARNING: On this journey you will experience higher levels of consciousness.

Next I learned that it takes everyone being on different journeys to keep me in practice for acceptance. There is really no one path that is right or wrong. This adds wonderful flavor to the world. I know, I know, you want to see the answers to my questions from earlier. Okay.

Those answers came in what I see as Phase Two. Phase One: empty the bucket. Phase Two: start to refill. So here goes...

In December 2014 I received a letter in the mail from my sister, Elizabeth. Little did I know that this letter was going to be my slingshot into Phase Two. She let me know that our mother had passed away, backed with beautiful stories of how Mom never forgot me and always remembered my birthday.

This was life-changing for me. I immediately felt a connection and was truly grateful. I felt inside that the hand of God himself was literally healing my heart as I read her letter. I called Elizabeth when I was done and we talked for five hours. By the end of this conversation I knew that she could guide me to some of the missing pieces to my puzzle.

She has not only been used as a teacher, but a best friend. We have experienced in the last six months together more of God's grace and guidance than I have experienced all my years prior.

Now remember what I told you – whatever new information comes your way, always pray if this is what God wants for you. Just because my sister has been a huge tool in helping me find answers doesn't mean I haven't kept God in the loop. That way I have the confidence that whatever I believe now is truly what God would have for me.

So here goes...

Question #1: Why is God so big until he stands next to Jesus?

I never understood why Jesus was the utmost focus. To me, this felt wrong. Though Jesus' importance in my life has not changed, his position has. I see now that God being the incredible creator that he is – IS truly in everything. Not just things that I see, but things that I don't see. He created molecules, atoms, cells, etc. So therefore He is in everything. The energy in the universe, the sound waves coming out of your radio, and that feeling you get on the inside when something makes sense or doesn't. That's God.

Question #2: Why is Jesus the only way to God when God is the Almighty Creator?

I do not agree with this anymore. God is so completely love and light that He gives us as many lifetimes as we need to allow our souls to learn and master all the things that he has for us. See, our soul starts with a plan and we have to have that plan completed and

mastered. And when the work is done we can ascend and rest in the presence of God himself. This is God's ultimate desire for us.

Question #3: Why does it take so much sorrow (Jesus' crucifixion) to get to the ultimate goal (heaven)?

I feel that if this was the only way to heaven, then God picks favorites of who can be with him and who can't because of rules. I don't believe God can be bound by rules. I believe that saying that "the only way to heaven is through Jesus the Son" is a human way of having control over the masses.

Jesus' crucifixion was a beautiful picture of love and sacrifice and what our end game is: ascension into heaven. I'd much rather focus on Jesus' life and all the examples that he set for us to follow. He was the most amazing teacher that has ever walked the planet. The world is his classroom and he is the teacher. Go to school with Jesus. Yup, count me in!

Question #4: Why do I have to look a certain way to represent Christianity – no tattoos, natural color hair, no outrageous self-expression?

There are a few church families out there that will take someone in no matter how they come. But those are very rare. Most religious Christians could give you a scripture to back their prejudice. I know because I was one of them.

However, with my higher level of consciousness I now realize that I took a lot of scripture out of context to back up my power that was given to me by being a Christian. Power huh? More like my own ignorance. All God expects from you is for you to follow your path and to complete your lessons so you can be with Him. I really don't think how you look would affect that.

Question #5: Why did the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent God create humans that were going to go to hell?

I don't believe he did. Separation from you is not what He wants or would even accept. He loves you immensely and is excited for you to get home with Him. I know reincarnation is a very controversial and intense subject. However, this is the only thing that makes sense to me that allows God to take the position He deserves. God is love, period. Doesn't the bible say love is patient, love is kind, love does not judge? Why would we tell man to be this way, and then say that the one who created us is judgmental and full of wrath? That doesn't make sense to me.

Question #6: Why would He allow free will to separate us from him?

He didn't. God sees all of us as beautiful. Our free will is part of that beauty. The further along our path we get the higher our consciousness is, the more our free will draws us closer

to Him. When He gave us the right to take our journey in our own ways it allows us to learn things completely in the end. It is just up to us how long it takes. He loves you so much that He is willing to wait. Our God is an awesome God!

I wrote this story to let people know that you are not alone. If the title sparked an interest then maybe you have asked many of the same questions that I did. My circle got very small, very quick, and going against the grain was very new to me, but it was worth it!

God is much bigger to me now, and things one by one have started to make sense. I hope this story has either given you a yearning for your own truth or has answered some questions and brought you peace.

Remember, no path is wrong and they all are important. Just make sure you are on the one that is right for you.

Big loves and lots of light,

Celeste Aurora
(aka Cissy)