

## Jason W. Slaczka

### *Waiting on the Lord: A Memoir Excerpt*

*The segment which follows describes the inner conflict I struggled with when I couldn't reconcile things our pastor taught with my own experience. I hope it also suggests that little progress can be made through blind obedience.*

We huddled on the family room floor, the four of us, still wearing our Sunday clothes. Sitting knee-to-knee we had been praying for two days and nights, so far.

I couldn't focus anymore. I had so many questions but tiredness kept yanking me into a fuzzy daze. I peeked up at Mom who sat across from me, her eyes closed, her lips whispering desperately for our sins to be washed white as snow. My legs had been asleep for so long I passed some time pretending this is what it would feel like to not have any. By this time tomorrow none of us would be here. We'd be with Jesus.

I imagined the landlord banging on our door, his mouth twisted tight like it got when he busted me fooling around in the basement workroom he kept at our house. He'd show up for sure when Mom didn't make the rent payment.

When nobody answered I knew he'd let himself in even though Mom gave him hell last time. I could hear the bark of his voice turn into a question when he found our emptied clothes on the family room floor like cold ashes from a long-dead fire.

But maybe Jesus would make us wear our clothes because being naked is a sin even though I can't figure out why. I hoped he'd at least let us wear our underwear. Thinking about how mad Mom got the time I busted in on her in the bathroom, I could only imagine how pissed she'd be if she had to be naked in front of Jesus and everyone.

When he found our clothes, maybe the landlord would be able to tell that Jesus had been there to get us, or maybe he'd even go to heaven, too. I'd seen the gold cross around his neck that was always tangled in his chest hair. I couldn't picture him naked.

We lived in an old farmhouse our dad said was all the way out in Bum Funny, Egypt whenever he came to pick us up. Since the divorce, we spent every weekend at his tiny apartment. He could be the one to not find us when he realized the world had been turned over to the devil just like we'd been telling him it would. But it made me sad to think about him.

He was still Catholic. Just from the way pastor spit out the word like it actually tasted bad I knew being Catholic must be somewhere between being a Satan worshiper and a practicing witch.

Once I'd become friends with a kid at school. We got close quickly

because we were both desperate for friendship. I'd been to his house many times. His family was very poor and had to deal with an alcoholic father. Our friendship was terminated when someone in our church told my mom that his mom was a real live witch who even cast spells on people.

In our church Catholics were people confused by the devil into believing the Pope was God. In our church whoever didn't believe exactly like we did was being manipulated and blinded by Satan, and would burn in hell forever and ever, amen.

But for 1,000 years after the second coming of Christ, Satan would be allowed by God to rule the earth. I thought of dad fighting hordes of hungry demon people over scraps of food. Mom said it would be his own fault, that he'd been given the chance to ask Jesus to be his personal savior. She also said he'd have to repent for being loyal to the great whore, but I wasn't sure what she meant.

We made sure to ask him every time we spent the weekend if he was now ready for us to lead him in prayer so he could invite Jesus into his heart so he could go to heaven with us. But he always smiled and said maybe next weekend.

Pastor says Jesus will give everyone the chance to repent before He returns. It sounded fair. Then I thought about my baby cousin who was eight days old when he died. He looked like one of my sister's dolls laying in his tiny coffin. How would he have the chance to repent? And for what? When I asked my youth group teacher, he told me that all of mankind is automatically born into a sinful state because Adam ate the apple. It didn't sound fair to me anymore.

Pastor also says to have faith whenever something didn't make sense, that God would reveal His will to our limited understanding in his own time. But I was curious about everything and was a pain with all my questions. It seemed that the answers always circled back to just have faith. So to me have faith was another way to say I don't know.

All this thinking made me even more tired and hungry. Plus I had to pee. We knew at any second we would be raptured, so being away from each other was scary.

So we prayed about it and came up with a good way to use the bathroom. While one of us was in there, the other three stood outside the door while singing "Amazing Grace." This way, as long as there was still singing we knew He hadn't come yet. It reminded me of going Christmas caroling, only different.

After we all did "Amazing Grace," Mom let us munch on crackers and cheese. We all wanted something hot, but if Jesus came back in the twinkling of an eye before it was done cooking, then the house would burn down after we left.

We all went back to the family room where Mom told us to spend some time thinking about any sins that might still be staining our snow. It was important that we ask forgiveness quickly so God couldn't hold it against us and be forced to leave us behind. I had an idea to ask God to forgive me in general for any and all sins I'd ever done. Then I was afraid he would see it as being lazy, so I hurried to repent for that, too. It felt like I spent more time repenting than I did sinning.

Since we'd come home from church on Sunday we'd been on the lookout for Jesus. Now it was Wednesday afternoon, and my mind floated to what my friends at school would be doing.

We spent Sunday night praying non-stop, and when the sun came up on Monday, mom told us we wouldn't be going to school. I was excited, but after three days of waiting, I was ashamed that I'd rather be at school.

My friends would be in fifth hour, which was World History for me. But this only made me think about how after Jesus came for us, I wouldn't get to go to college and get laid, even though I was still piecing together exactly what the second part was. All I knew was I wanted to get whatever it was.

Pastor always told us we had to turn our backs on the things of this world and be grateful for the blessings of our salvation. But being grateful was hard sometimes. Like the Sunday when Pastor handed our wooden paddles to all the parents of our church. He said the Lord had impressed it upon his heart that the young people in his flock were not being sufficiently corrected, that God called upon him to make these paddles. He promised they were made with love.

The parents made their way down the center aisle toward the communion table where a stack of paddles were issued one by one. Etched into the beautiful table were the words: This do in remembrance of Me.

When the parents returned to their pew, some tried awkwardly to find a place to set the offensive wood, while a couple others tested its balance. Pastor told the young that we should be grateful that we had parents who loved us enough to chasten us.

Mom brought her paddle home that day and used it to prop open the bathroom window. It has been the paddle's place ever since.

I thought about a girl at my school who liked to wear shirts that had Bible verses on them, like Romans 1:16, which I won a candy bar for memorizing at youth group. Whenever she wore them, I was embarrassed. Kids would mock her, calling her Virgin Mary, even putting thumbtacks on her seat. But no matter what they did to her she would just smile like they'd done her a favor, and tell them that Jesus loves them.

I'd root for her secretly, but whenever I saw her surrounded in the

hallway, I went the other way. I knew I should be standing right next to her just because we had the same Savior, but I knew also that I could never stand what she went through. She was the bravest person I knew. I hoped she would get the room she wanted in God's many roomed mansion. If she didn't, then I was stuck out of luck for sure.

Our family room looked like a Gypsy camp with all the bedding and Bibles. I'd tried a few times to crawl to my blankets and sleep, but I kept waking up afraid Jesus had left me behind. It reminded me of waiting for Santa, only with Santa I was excited. I was confused to be relieved as well as disappointed to jerk awake and still be there.

During Sunday service, Pastor promised that Jesus would return sometime before midnight on Wednesday. When he explained to the astonished church how he knew this, he handed out a small white booklet he said explained it in detail. He went on and on about Jewish holidays Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

I was confused because I could remember him saying to us whenever he thought we were up to no good that we had to be sure our snow was clean for we knew not when Jesus would come stealing back like a thief in the night.

Pastor asked if there were any questions, and a couple hands were raised. The questions he couldn't answer he said to just have faith, just have faith and wait on the Lord.

I knew what waiting on the Lord meant. It meant do nothing. It seemed people said they were waiting on the Lord when they felt helpless and it made that feeling tolerable.

One lady stood and said maybe we should all wait for Jesus together in prayer and celebration, but Pastor said no, that this was a time to spend with our loved ones.

I watched the sky through our family room turn purple and then black. None of us had said anything for hours. If anybody still prayed, it was from behind glassy eyes. My little brother was sleeping on his side in a corner.

I didn't realize I fell asleep until the shards of mom's sobs slashed into my sleep. I sat up to see my sister balled up in her lap. My brother now sat up staring at everyone. The clock showed 2:28. I looked out the window for the distant glow of fire I imagined must follow Satan wherever he went, but it was all darkness. All we could do was wait on the Lord.