The spiritual resurrection of Warren Hoyt.

 I was born in a decent family, but not a strongly Christian one. My grandfather was a Methodist pastor, and he named my dad John Wesley Hoyt. Dad named his first son John Wesley Hoyt Jr., and my brother John named his son, JWH the third. My grandfather was a pastor/preacher, but from what I can gather, his faith was more about being a good person, moral, upright, etc., rather than about the supernatural power of God to save, the need for radical conversion, obedience to the Lord, or what we know of as relationship with the Lord. My grandmother was probably more of a vital Christian than her husband, but still, her faith was mostly about being good and kind, etc. It just wasn’t the kind of thing I’ve come to experience.

 As a result, my dad was a kind man, and a good man. He believed in God. But Christianity to him was mostly about rules and regulations. His father was rather harsh with him. So he didn’t really walk with God in an intimate, daily, practical kind of way. My mom was Episcopalian. She believed in God, and went to church as a young person. She was taught morality and responsibility and such, but again, not so much about a supernatural faith in a living Christ who could be intimately involved in a person’s day to day life.

 Because my parents didn’t have a vibrant kind of faith, they couldn’t pass that on to their kids. They took us to church, but we hated it! It was boring, meaningless, and just a social club to us. I never thought of it as a way to understand and navigate life, or something that would be truly helpful to me. When I was 14, my parents told me I didn’t have to go to church anymore if I didn’t want to. This was a Big Mistake, but they didn’t know any better! It was more than 7 years before I would ever return to a church.

 At 17, I began smoking marijuana, and quickly proceeded to other drugs, including lots of alcohol. My sister actually “turned me on” to pot when I went to stay with her in California one summer. We smoked pot every night, and I gradually began to like it.

 When I returned to Florida, I started working construction with a bunch of rough, hippy-like guys. I smoked with them and began to imitate their lifestyles. I traveled across America 9 times, once on a motorcycle, once in a ’63 Chevy Impala, a couple of times in an old Ford van. A friend and I lived on the beach in California and surfed every day, smoking pot at night. Another friend and I sold blood to get money, stayed in a crummy hotel in Albuquerque for a time, and just bummed around with all kinds of disreputable people.

 My life was about having experiences. I started taking LSD, and going on trips that way too. Eventually I took Quaaludes, amphetamines, cocaine, even heroin a couple of times, but never got a good batch, thank God. I grew large quantities of marijuana in a secluded area of farm land near my parents’ house in Fl. For a while I lived with 13 freaks or hippies in a house on the edge of a woods, and we grew marijuana there too. These guys were all in a rock band, and practiced till all hours in the house. We all did drugs, and had psychedelic paint and black lights in the room where the band played.

 Some of my hippie friends were into what we called “awareness” and that ended up becoming the name of the band as well. We talked about seeing the “white light” which was some sort of breakthrough “revelation” or enlightenment we thought a person could experience if they did enough acid and/or meditated, or whatever. We were all looking for that kind of thing to eventually happen to us, and fully believed we were just on the verge of it. We talked about it all the time, and sought it through drugs, and some dabbling in Eastern religious thought.

 About this time, my parents, but especially my mother, became very concerned about all us kids. I was doing drugs and they knew it, but so was my younger sister, and the older sister who got me started on marijuana. My brother was in Vietnam, and when he came back, he drank all the time and smoked pot too.

My oldest sister was going through marriage problems and she became so depressed she was prescribed valium and other drugs. She tried to commit suicide with pills more than once, and had to be put in the psych ward. My second-oldest sister also had a terrible relationship, and tried to kill herself by slashing her wrists. We were a really messed up family!

Searching for help, my mom found a book by Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, the title of which was “Come Help Change the World.” The author said that if a person wanted to change the world, he or she would have to be changed themselves, and he explained how Christ died and rose again to make that possible. There was a simple prayer in the back of the book, and Bill Bright said if you wanted to be changed and help change the world, you could begin by praying this prayer. My mother prayed the prayer alone in our house. She didn’t feel much of anything, didn’t have a vision, or hear God’s audible voice. But slowly, she became more aware of God’s presence and work all around her. She went to a Methodist church and got involved in something called the Navigators, a one-on-one discipleship ministry. Through all of that, she began to grow spiritually and understand more about God. She began to pray consistently for the family and to trust God to hear and answer. She met a couple there who happened to be visiting, that would play an important role in my life sometime later. She began to leave gospel tracts around for us to read, and even put stickers on my mirror when I stayed at their house. I thought she was just getting old, and that was why she was suddenly so concerned for eternal things.

 On more than one occasion, she took me to meet Navigator people, and got them to witness to me. I prayed the prayer of salvation on at least 2 or 3 occasions, but nothing ever came of it. Looking back, I now know why. First, I wasn’t really sick of my sinful life at that point. I didn’t think it was bad or wrong, and I wasn’t looking for a way out. I had no intention of quitting drugs and living differently, which is what the Bible would call repentance. Neither did I really have a true faith in Jesus Christ, that He could actually enter my life and change me, that He could live in me and really work in my life in practical ways.

 About this time, I broke up with a girlfriend and joined the Navy. What a change and what a clash of civilizations that was! A hippy getting his hair cut and being forced into a routine of discipline! I did what I had to do, but I was still a hippy at heart. Once I got out of boot camp and got out to the fleet, I was back to drugs, alcohol and smoking pot almost constantly. We hung out in bars, engaging in very risky behavior, I went AWOL in the Philippines, but my Filipina girlfriend turned me in for $20 (a month’s rent), and I was arrested and brought back in hand-cuffs. I was punished severely and restricted to the ship. But my mom kept praying.

 Eventually my dad also came to Christ. Now there were two of them praying in agreement! Gradually things began to happen to me. People would come up and witness to me about Jesus Christ. Two particular times I remember were when I was drinking whiskey from a bottle I had in a paper bag in a park, and one time when I was on acid and a young man came looking for someone else. I always wondered why these people came to me – did I have a neon sign above me or something? I now realize it was all the result of my parents’ prayers!

 I ended up starting down the road to recovery through first going to the psych ward at Tripler Army Hospital. That came about through a very strange turn of events. It really could’ve been called a coincidence, except that now I know it wasn’t – it was a God-incidence! I had several experiences that brought me to the place where I was getting tired of my life, and all seemed darkness around me. I began to want change. But I would never have gone to Rehab if it hadn’t been for a chance conversation while standing in a pay line. The drug rehab officer “happened” to walk by, and he took me to his office and eventually got me sent to the psych ward.

 While there, I still got drugs smuggled in and I got high. But I did find a Gideon Bible and I read it surreptitiously, finding the passage in Jn. 14:15-17 where Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. (NKJV) I thought I should try to obey the commandments of God. And I prayed that God would send me the Comforter, though I didn’t even know what or who the Comforter was! I went to a chaplain, thinking he could get me in touch with God. But he offered to hypnotize me, then when I was late to the appointment, he cussed me out! “This God stuff is all a joke!” I thought, and went back to reading “High Times” magazine and planning to use drugs again in my heart.

 The Navy sent me to Rehab near my home in Florida, because most who go to these programs don’t really rehabilitate. They get kicked out of the service with a dishonorable discharge, so it’s best to send them as near as possible to where they joined the military.

 At first, I was placed in a lockdown situation, strip-searched and observed 24 - 7. Eventually they moved me to a different section of the center where I had more freedom, and was eventually even allowed to leave the building at night. But the first time I got out I went to the woods with a friend and got high again! On the way home, I tripped on a railroad track and had to have stitches in my left eyebrow. The next day, my counselor took me to the rest room, and had me look at myself in the mirror. “Do you like what you see?” he asked. Actually, I thought the big patch over my eye and the dried blood on my face made me look kinda cool – like some kind of warrior! But that wasn’t the point he wanted me to get out of the talk.

 “You know,” he said, you don’t have a drug problem.” I was a bit taken aback. “I don’t?” “No,” he said, you have other problems, and that’s why you use drugs. But your problem isn’t really the drugs per se.” That stuck with me, and I’ve really come to know the truth of it.

 One weekend, my parents drove 120 miles to come visit me, but the Marine guards were actually smoking pot that night, and the smell of marijuana was in the air strongly! My dad recognized that smell, and he became discouraged. He was sure I’d never change. He didn’t have much experience with trusting God yet at that point, so his faith was just not up to that sort of challenge. Later in life his faith would become much stronger.

 I finally got to go home on a weekend, but that first time turned out badly. I called up some old friends and we all just got plastered. When I came home, my mother really cried, and I felt terrible about it, but there just seemed to be little hope I could ever be different. But God was working behind the scenes in answer to my parents’ prayers, even when they had a hard time believing it.

 To strengthen her faith, my mom continued going to church and to the Navigators meetings. At one of those meetings, she met a couple who, it turned out, were only visiting the Navigators that one night. But they belonged to a church, which, like Jesus Chapel, had what is called home groups or cell groups, and they had a group that met in their home. My mom had never been there, but she knew they prayed for people. She asked them if they would be willing to speak with me and try to minister to me. They agreed, but apparently they hadn’t really listened to her well, because we found out later that they thought I was a counselor at the Navy Rehab place, not a person who was attending it for treatment!

 On my next weekend leave, I went home again to visit my parents. My mom told me she had arranged for me to visit this home group, and asked that I go fishing with my dad for the day, so as to not be able to drink or use drugs. I agreed to go, not knowing what to expect. As we came home from fishing and the time drew near, I began to feel very nervous. I tried to get out of the whole thing, but with an urgency I’d not seen before, my mother pleaded with me to go. She just felt I was supposed to go to this, she didn’t even know why. My father took me to the house where the meeting was held and just dropped me off. I was on my own!

 What a night that was, and what a meeting! Before the meeting began, the leader my mother had met asked me about myself. As I answered his questions, the whole group quickly realized this was no Christian counselor seeking more of the Holy Spirit as they had imagined! They looked a bit nervous, not knowing exactly how to respond, but they told me that God had obviously brought me to them that night in order to minister to me. I told them to please not change the order of their meeting for little ol’ me!

 The meeting began with prayer, in which the leaders asked God to lead and guide, and I’ll never forget this – he spoke about the blood of Jesus, and asked that that blood might cover them all that night. He said repeatedly, “We plead the blood of Jesus.” I didn’t understand that, and it sounded strange, but I filed it away in my memory. Now of course, I understand exactly what that meant, and why it was so important! But the leader, Ken, finished his prayer and said, “Now let’s have some praise and worship.” I didn’t know what that was either, but I’ll never forget one song they sang, “Praise the name of Jesus, He’s my Rock, He’s my fortress, He’s my deliverer, in Him will I trust.”

 As the small group sang these songs, they closed their eyes and lifted their hands. I thought I should try to do as they did. But as I attempted to lift my hands to heaven, I began to shake and tremble, and the muscles of my abdomen convulsed and knotted up, alternately tightening and loosening. I was embarrassed and told them I didn’t know what was happening to me! They told me not to worry, and had me sit down, then placed towels around me and told me if I felt like throwing up, to go ahead and do it!

 I was so shocked and amazed, I just had no experience of anything like this! It turned out that that particular night was very special for the group, because they had another visitor, one of the pastors on staff at their large Assembly of God church, who moved in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This man’s name was Larry Kennedy.

 Larry came up to me, placed his hands upon me, and began to tell me about my life – details that no one could possibly have known about me! He told me about my relationship with my older brother, about things I had thought about my mom’s parents, and other things I can’t remember now. He told me these sins blocked my relationship with God, and led me in a prayer of confession, in which he had me confess and renounce my sins before God and ask for His forgiveness. I just followed along, not really knowing what was going on.

 When that confession and repentance phase was over with, I was still shaking and knotting up on the floor. Suddenly this pastor spoke out strongly and said, “You spirit of addiction, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to leave this man now and not come back!” Not knowing what to expect, I suddenly began to thrash wildly about on the floor, flailing my arms around and growling like an animal. I didn’t do this on my own. I had never seen or heard of deliverance before. This simply happened to me! The pastor again commanded the spirit to come out of me. After a few moments of this, it seemed I actually felt something come out of me, though I cannot explain how that was, what it was, or where it went from me. I just felt something come out, and I slumped over to the floor. But the ministry time wasn’t over yet, it was just getting started. In a couple of minutes, I was sitting up again, and once again trembling and feeling my muscles knot up.

 Pastor Larry was still behind me, with his hands on my head or shoulders. All the home group members were praying fervently, seated in the chairs and couches of the living room that formed a circle around me. Suddenly, Larry began to speak to a different spirit, and again, he commanded this spirit to come out of me in the name of Jesus. I waited on the floor for a few moments, then again, my arms began flailing and I was growling and moaning like a wild animal. Pastor Larry continued to command the spirit to leave me, and suddenly, something again burst forth from me and I slumped forward.

 This experience of deliverance went on and on for hours. I don’t remember all the spirits that came out of me, but I think there were four or five. The first was addictions, but another one was blasphemy. As Larry commanded it to come out, I suddenly had all sorts of profane words flood my mind and start to come out of my mouth. For years I had “cussed like a sailor” because I was a sailor! I even said these foul, profane words in front of my own dear mother! But somehow, Larry knew what was going on, and he spoke out with authority, “You are not to say anything! I command you to in Jesus’ name to come out of this man, and say nothing! Shut up!” That particular spirit seemed to stir me up more violently than any of the previous ones, but it too had to eventually submit to the name of Jesus and leave me.

 Sometime around midnight, everything became still. I was very calm on the floor. The home group people were all praying in tongues quietly. It was like a storm had passed or a violent sickness. One brother quietly said, “You’re free, brother.” I somehow just knew he was right, and together, we all stood to our feet. Pastor Larry said to me, “Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who died for your sins and rose again?” Weeping, I said, “I believe whatever you people believe!” At that point, Larry led me in the sinner’s prayer, to confess Christ and receive Him into my life personally as Lord and Savior. I just repeated the prayer Larry led me in. I felt nothing special at that time; I just repeated the prayer word for word after the pastor.

 After that, Pastor Larry explained to me that my life was like a house. It had been swept clean, and the demons were no longer living inside me. But it wasn’t enough for my “house” to be empty of the negative things – it needed to be filled up with something positive, or the demons would come back. I needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. I accepted what they told me, and all of them gathered ‘round to lay hands on me and pray. They told me that if I felt like I had any “new words” in my mind, to not hesitate to speak them out. I was rather perplexed. “New words”? But they prayed, and they led me in a prayer, asking God to fill me with His Spirit. I prayed it obediently, just as I had the earlier prayer. We all waited in silence a few moments. Some prayed quietly in tongues, though at the time, I didn’t know what that was.

 Suddenly, I lifted my hands for the first time (earlier I had tried to, but couldn’t). I thanked God for His Spirit. And then I began to tremble again, in a totally different way than I had when the demons were plaguing me, and it seemed I had these three little words in my head, so I tried to speak them out. As I did, it seemed a flood of words came into me, seemingly entering at the top of my head, and going down to my belly, then up and out of my mouth again. I can’t describe why they seemed to flow that way, but that’s the way I perceived it. But as soon as I spoke those words, I shut up again, because I wasn’t sure if I was “doing it right.” I clammed up, but the people didn’t care, they were so excited! “He’s got it,” they all said. I wasn’t real sure but if they said so, I believed ‘em!

 Afterwards, they put a New Testament in my hands and said, “This is God’s Word. You need to read it every day to learn about this new life He’s given you. And you need to pray to Him every day in English, and in that language you just spoke.” I read the NT through in two weeks! I prayed every day in English, but I just couldn’t speak that other language at all, no matter how hard I tried.

 One week later, I was able to visit with some members of the home group and they asked if I’d been speaking in tongues. I explained that I hadn’t been able to. They prayed over me, and some kind of squeezed me, telling me to not hold back, but to just start speaking in tongues again, “Just let it out!” they spoke enthusiastically. I tried, but I just couldn’t do it. I didn’t understand, but I was still thankful for my salvation. Amazingly, I never doubted I had received the Holy Spirit. I thanked God for filling me, but I just didn’t understand why I couldn’t speak in tongues.

 The following week, it finally “clicked” for me when I was out on a baseball field late at night. I just started thanking God for saving me, for being in my life, for the hope He’d given me. I thanked Him for giving me His Spirit, even though I couldn’t speak in that heavenly language any more. I can’t really explain what happened, but as I thanked God and prayed like that, it suddenly came into my mind so clearly that I *had* received God’s Spirit! He was living inside me! And if that was true, I *could* speak in that language! I can’t explain why, but I just knew it! And I opened my mouth and started to speak in tongues, a language I’d never learned! It was kind of like learning to ride a bicycle – you just let go and start moving out! Over the next weeks, that language increased in and through me. There were more words that came out, and they were different words. I just prayed in tongues freely, whenever I prayed. And I’ve been praying like that ever since!

 The night I was delivered and saved, I came home near 1 am, and was met on the front porch by my mother. She just hadn’t been able to sleep – she had to know how things had gone with me. “Well?” she asked as I came in the screen door. “What happened? How’d it go?”

 It’s strange, but after all I’d experienced that night, I was hesitant to tell my mom I’d become a Christian. I had doubts in my mind. (Interestingly, when the disciples went to a mountain in Galilee after Christ had risen from the dead, the Bible says they worshipped Him, but some doubted. I guess it was a similar experience for me.) I thought to myself, “What if this doesn’t last? Nothing I’ve ever done has lasted. I’ve always gone back on my word or dropped off from things I’ve set out to do. I hate to tell mom I’m a Christian and get her hopes up, only to blow it and change my mind a week from now.” I thought these things in my mind. But with my mouth I spoke something totally different. “Mom,” I said, “I think I got saved tonight.” There, I had said it! My mom’s eyes instantly filled with tears, and she just rushed to hug me. “That’s so wonderful!” was basically all she said.

 The following Monday, I went back to rehab, and told everyone my story. A heroin-addicted friend of mine who had tried to commit suicide in my presence actually shielded his eyes when I came near him. He acted as if I were the bright sun shining in his face! When I told my therapy group, they were all dumbfounded and speechless! I think my counselor spoke for everyone when he said, “I don’t exactly know what happened to you, or what you’ve got now. But it sure seems to be working, and I hope it continues to work for you.” This January was the start of my 33rd year with Jesus Christ. I think it’s still working for me!

 I had to go before a board of high-ranking officers for an evaluation later in my rehabilitation, to see if I was recovered enough to be returned to service in the fleet. They asked me what had happened to me, and I had to tell them the whole story! I realize now what a witnessing opportunity that was for Jesus Christ, but at the time, I was just answering the questions and doing what I had to do!

 I still had two more years to go of Navy service, but those last two years were totally different from my first two! It was the difference of night to day! I worked hard. I did my duty. I was straight, drug and alcohol free. I had Christian friends and we kept ourselves on the straight and narrow. I read the Bible and learned so much so fast, it was incredible. I witnessed to everyone around me all the time. On my last ship (I served on three in all), we had Bible studies every day. I eventually even taught some myself. Some of the guys told me, “You ought to be a preacher.” I had no idea I eventually would be!

 Since that time, I have had so many wonderful experiences in the Lord. I have grown and learned so much. God gave me a wonderful wife, for whom I had prayed, and I had the privilege of leading her to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit only three days after her conversion. God has given us 4 wonderful, now adult children, three of whom are or will be married within a month. I have been in ministry for over 20 years, and have traveled to nations and various parts of the US, preaching and teaching the Word of God. So often during those years I have witnessed to someone in a situation like my own. God has let me be the answer to some mother’s prayer as Larry Kennedy was the answer to my mother’s prayer. I have been blessed to lead, I don’t know how many, other people to Christ. Somehow, the story of God’s work on earth, and especially the Resurrection of His Son, spread and came to my mom, and it changed *her* story. Then she prayed and witnessed, and that changed my father’s story, and then one by one, our whole family’s story. My story has intersected many other people’s lives, and played a part in changing their stories. And on and on this goes. I hope my story can be a part of changing someone’s story here today.

 My point in telling you all this is to say, “Jesus Christ is Risen!” And He is risen indeed! Because He is risen, I have been resurrected in a spiritual sense, and I live a totally different, new life. Because I have been resurrected, I know that anyone can be resurrected spiritually.

Come help change the world! Come and surrender yourself to Christ. He will raise you to new life. He will make you a new creation. He will one day raise us all to walk in eternity with Him! Glory to His name!

I want to close by just pointing out some important aspects of my resurrection story:

1. Life without God had no meaning, no direction. I didn’t know God, so I thought life was about whatever *I* wanted; *my* pleasure, *my* philosophy. It wasn’t meant to be that way, and that kind of thinking brought destructive habits and a meaningless waste of my life. I could’ve ended up in Hell, but there was a resurrection!
2. Because Jesus rose from the dead, there can be a resurrection in our lives and in our families! God is out to change the world. He does it one life at a time. A drug or alcohol-addicted son can be resurrected and changed. A marriage can be resurrected and saved. A dysfunctional family can come into wholeness and harmony. Because Jesus came to earth, died for our sins and rose again, new life is truly possible!
3. Giving your heart and life to God is the first step. He wants to save the whole household, but it all begins with one “resurrection.” My mom looked for help in God, and He saved her, raised her to new life! She believed the gospel story of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, and she surrendered herself to the Lord in a simple act of faith.
4. Consistent prayer will make the difference in your life and the lives of those around you. It is the secret to changing the world! You just pray to find God in the first place, and to experience the new life He has for you. And you just pray and keep on praying, believing that God hears you if you want to see His work go on in your life and your family’s life. Be patient and give the whole process time. Don’t give up your faith when things look negative. God is working, you just might not see it!
5. It’s amazing how my grandparents prayed and that eventually got all of us saved, but they didn’t pass on their faith very well for various reasons. We need to know what we believe and communicate it faithfully. We must have a vibrant, living relationship with God, and know how to pass that on. We can’t make our loved ones “get it,” but we do need to know what we believe and how to articulate it, both with our words and with our lives.
6. The home group meeting was so crucial to my salvation. The people met faithfully for their own growth and fellowship, but they were willing to welcome a needy person, not really like them. May God help us as Jesus Chapel to be those kind of people. We are here to tell our stories, so all can know Christ’s story, and all can have resurrection life!