

Never will I leave you

I spent twenty years being “Christian” until I finally figured out what it really means.

For nineteen years, I spent the sequence of Friday-Saturday-Sunday entirely at church every week, spreading out my time between youth groups, bible studies, and services in two different languages. I volunteered to teach bible study to children as soon as I was old enough. I was unanimously voted president of my youth group for my “dedication and holy attitude”. I read the Bible from cover to cover twice through before my sixteenth birthday. I was on the music team, the core leadership team, the newcomer welcoming team. Everything I did, every job I volunteered for, I did it because it made me feel more holy. Closer to God somehow, even though my heart felt so empty every week.

I remember thinking to myself: “Is this really what it means to be a Christian?”

Then I turned twenty years old and went on a yearlong trip to Korea, ostensibly to teach English and make some money out of it. Beneath the surface, though, I think I was tired of my super perfect lifestyle. Of being the model Christian kid that everyone knew. I wanted to rebel. I wanted to live a little for once.

Korea was everything I wanted it to be. I wasn’t surrounded by Christian people- in fact, there wasn’t a single friend I knew that went to church on Sundays. My new friends showed me how to drink beer, how to dance with girls at a club, how to sleep in on Sunday mornings and not think about anything. More than those things, they showed me how good it feels to gratify my physical desires. And even though those things felt so good in the moment, the emptiness in my heart afterwards was even worse than before. So, I kept chasing after stronger drinks, more sensual pleasures, to forget about the growing void in my heart. It never worked.

When I returned from Korea, I felt ashamed to return to my church. I had spent an entire year doing everything I wasn’t supposed to do. Without doing any of the things that made me “Christian” before, I felt like I was worthless. More than my church friends, I cared about what God himself would think. I thought for sure that he wouldn’t want me back. Not in this shape.

Then some pastor from Texas who I had never met before (and who I haven’t seen since) gave me this verse:

“...because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

Hebrews 13:5b.

In that moment, I realized what it truly means to be a Christian. It has nothing to do with what I do for him; it has everything to do with the fact that he loves me no matter what.

The good news for you is that you don’t have to waste twenty years of your life to figure this out. You don’t have to try to earn God’s love by doing anything. You can have it right now.

But only if you want to.