

## From a gap to Agape

I was raised in a non-Christian home. Growing up, I went to church a few times with friends, but all I learned was that I was terrible at memorizing Bible verses and that my hair is impossible to comb over. I knew nothing about the Bible or the true meaning of the Christian faith.

When I came to Princeton, I vaguely wished to know more about Christianity in order to satisfy my intellectual curiosity, but I never acted on this desire. As such, six months ago I never would have thought that I would graduate as a Christian.

Yet God pursued me even so. During my last year here, He sent me so many friends to share His message. One asked me out of the blue about my religious views and explained to me the truth claims of Christianity. Another invited me to a Bible study. A third explained to me specific ways in which God's grace could help me with my greatest struggles. I began to develop a thirst for knowledge of God. I began to open my heart to faith.

I immediately realized that God could help me in so many ways and that He wanted to. I'm a perfectionist, and I tend to beat myself up when things don't go well. A lot of my perfectionism comes from my upbringing; as a child, I was often told that I wasn't good enough, that I needed to improve my academics or my piano skills or my behavior. I lived in fear that I would embarrass my family or myself. But as I learned through the Bible, I answer only to God. In whatever work I do, I am serving my Lord Jesus Christ. Though I am not even close to being perfect, God still looks favorably upon my work because by giving it my best effort, I am doing what He created me to do.

God offers peace in struggles like perfectionism, as well as many other gifts to those who keep their faith in Him. I saw the value of those gifts, and they appealed to me. Yet this presented me with a dilemma: what were my motives for becoming a Christian? I didn't want to come to faith purely because I wanted to receive His gifts. If I were to convert, I truly wanted to believe. I wanted to enter my faith with conviction.

I had no clue how to resolve this conflict, but I suspected that becoming intellectually convinced of the authenticity of the Gospel would resolve my conflict. If I truly believed that God sent His only Son to die so that humanity might be brought closer to Him — and that He raised His Son from the dead — I would fall earnestly and unquestionably in love with such a benevolent and loving God. Therefore, I investigated the truth of the New Testament, and though I now understand that the Bible discourages seeking signs from God, I prayed nightly for a divine sign.

Despite my impudence, God took mercy on me and convinced me of His existence.

During my spiritual journey, I started developing feelings for a Christian girl. We bonded over a mutual enjoyment of geeky things, and she helped me so much with my spiritual development. We forged a deep connection based on love and respect, but I knew she would have moral qualms about having a relationship with a non-Christian. At this point I realized I had even more motive to convert. But this deepened my inner conflict: was I really going to convert just because of a girl? Even if I did end up converting, how could I ever be sure that I was doing it for the right reasons?

The way my conflict was resolved could only have been God's work. For some strange reason, I had been the first guy to ever take this wonderful girl out on a date. Yet literally right after we realized our mutual affection, another guy, a Christian guy, asked her out. And they were perfect for each other. Suddenly, I was left out of the picture, my romantic aspirations frustrated once again. The timing of it all was painfully perfect, and it was as though God was telling me, "Thou shalt not have." At that point, I was angry and hurt. God apparently didn't want me to have a fruitful romantic life. It would've been so easy for me to turn my back on God, to neglect all of the spiritual development that I had undergone over the past year. However, I realized that through this denial, God was giving me something greater. I was attracted to the godliness of this girl, but the Lord showed me to seek it in Him first and foremost. And now that I had been sent this sign, now that that God had confirmed His existence to me, how could I reject His call? In my brokenness, I submitted to His authority. Even if it was His will that I should never find the right girl, then so be it. I committed myself to loving others more than myself and loving God above all. From that point on, I've been a Christian.

And you know what? Since I converted, my life has been blessed. I'd been happy plenty of times before converting, but that happiness tended to be fleeting. I'd often become saddened by the smallest things that didn't go my way. Now I have constant joy. If I am the least bit stressed, I can turn to God through prayer. In Him, I rejoice every day.