

MY FAITH JOURNEY

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I faintly remember glimpses of my childhood when my family and I would go to church in our old city. Every Sunday morning, people from our neighborhood would gather in the church, filling the vast, open space with quiet reverence. I still remember its beauty—the way the painted skies adorned the ceiling, how the sunlight streamed through its open windows, making the place feel warm and airy. I never questioned why we went; it was simply a part of life, as natural as eating or sleeping. At the time, I didn't fully understand faith, but I knew that every Sunday, my mother, father, younger brother, and I would sit in the pews, listen to the homily, and bow our heads in prayer.

Even outside of church, prayer was a constant in our home. My mother taught my brother and me to pray every night before bed and every morning when we woke up. My prayers were simple then—little wishes, fleeting thoughts, quiet conversations with God. It was my childlike way of seeking comfort, even if I didn't yet understand the depth of what I was doing.

That changed when I was in third grade. My English teacher, Teacher Belle, introduced us to a method of prayer using the acronym ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. It gave my prayers direction and meaning, teaching me that prayer was more than just asking for things—it was about praising, repenting, giving thanks, and trusting God's plan. For the first time, I understood that faith was not just about reciting memorized words but building a relationship with God.

But faith, I would later learn, is not always steady. When I reached ninth grade, my once close-knit family grew distant. Life at home felt tense, and the weight of academic pressure bore down on me. For the first time, I felt like I was losing control. The prayers that once came so naturally began to feel empty. Instead of praying at night, I found myself questioning what was happening. Doubt crept in, and without realizing it, I started praying less and distracting myself more.

It took time, but eventually, my family's problems eased. Things became lighter again, and slowly, I reconnected with God. I realized that despite my doubts, He had never left my side. Every challenge I had faced led me to where I needed to be. My faith, though shaken, had grown stronger. I began to see hardships not as punishments but as lessons—opportunities to grow, trust, and surrender.

Still, one thing remained unclear. As I grew older, I still didn't fully grasp the true meaning of going to church for years; I attended simply because my mother expected me to. I went through the motions, but my heart wasn't in it. That changed when a friend shared something that stayed with me. She said that going to church was her way of thanking God. It was such a simple thought, yet it completely shifted my perspective. Church was no longer an obligation but an act of love and gratitude.

Looking back, my faith journey has been far from perfect. It has been filled with moments of doubt, struggle, and questioning. But I've learned that faith isn't about always having the answers but trusting God even in uncertainty. It's about finding strength in Him in difficult times and remembering to be grateful for the good ones.

Today, my prayers are no longer just wishes or routines. They are conversations—with gratitude, hope, and faith at their core. And while my journey is still unfolding, I now walk it with trust, knowing that with each step, I am growing closer to Him.