

Ron Ziltz Testimony

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Preacher: Ron Ziltz

[0 : 00] I'm sure you will listen with attentive hearts and minds and open ears as Ron Zilts comes and just shares his testimony. And there may or may not be an opportunity for Q&A; at the end, but that will be up to him.

So, Ron, come right ahead. Hi, I'm Ron Zilts, and I was saved June 1978, and the first verse that really spoke to me was Psalm 27:10.

When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me out. And, well, I want to tell you a little bit about the road of my life to my salvation.

And the Lord was always there watching me from my mother's womb, as David said. And, well, anyway, I was born in Chicago in 1958, of course.

So, anyway, by the time I was eight years old, I had lived in five different states and didn't really have many friends because moving around all the time.

[1 : 22] Anyway, my parents, you know, got separated. So, we moved out of Chicago because we were back in Chicago at this time.

And she moved to a place probably 100 miles south of Chicago. And, anyway, I got sick after being there for, like, eight months.

And it was 1966. And doctors still made house calls then. And they thought it was the flu. So, he gave me penicillin, but it wasn't doing anything.

And so, I just kept getting sicker and sicker. And I, you know, lost my legs. I lost my speech. You know, and my temperature was, like, 105.

And it was maintained, you know. Stay there because if you have 105 temperature and they bring it right down, it's really not that bad.

[2 : 25] But this was, like, maintained. And finally, around Christmas time, see, I got sick in November. So, now the disease was eaten away at my brain until Christmas.

And so, my father came down. And anyway, I was too weak. They had to carry me out and everything.

And my father just, you know, got mad, I guess, and brought me to Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago. And the last thing I remember is I was in a tub with ice.

And so, I was in the hospital for eight months. And a month after I was there, they, you know, were giving me brainwave tests and, you know, everything else.

And I was totally aware of everything going on. And they got me up one night and gave me what they call a spinal tap.

[3 : 36] That feels like a needle this wide. And anyway, well, I found out now that it was encephalitis I had, which is a brain virus that travels up the central nervous system.

And it just kind of puts your brain to sleep. Like, almost like you're paralyzed, I guess, in a way, in the brain.

But I was totally aware of everything. So, but I lost, I couldn't walk. I couldn't talk. I had to wear a diaper again at nine years old.

You know? And so, like, two months in there, they got the disease out of me. And the rest of the time was really therapy, learning how to walk again and everything else.

So, I still couldn't talk even after I got out of the hospital for, like, another year. And when that year was up and I started talking again, one of the first things I had to do was choose which parent I'm going with.

[4 : 55] Now, I don't know, you know, if you really realize, but a brain virus like that, the after follow-up care, I was supposed to have counseling and therapy for years.

So, my brain just wasn't, you know, dealing with things. So, anyway, ended up, I was going with my mother at first staying in Chicago, but my brother and sister were going with my father.

So, I ended up going with them because, of course, you want to be with your brother and sister. So, anyway, he eventually got remarried and we moved up to Massachusetts.

Now, then I went to work when I was 13 years old. And it's, you know, it was kind of hard because I had a, my speech was really, you know, slow and everything.

But I was working for my father, so that was the easy part. But then at 15, I was paying room and board, living in the basement.

[6 : 20] And things were just getting bad for all my father's kids, my brother, sister, and myself. And my brother went off to college.

And my father was going to help him, but he stopped. So, my brother was kicked out. Then me, he tried, you know, get me a job in another town on a farm.

So, I'd live there, you know, to get me out of the house too. But I didn't realize this at the time. And, of course, at the holidays, I wanted to go home, be with my family.

And so, you know, I left the job and went home. And my father was a little upset. And he even made me quit school when I was 17.

And he was a big guy, so you really didn't argue with him. And he got me into the Army. Even though I told the recruiter that I was doing drugs, so they weren't going to let me in.

[7 : 38] My father was in Korea and had some pull with officers. And he got me sworn in. And I went in the Army. But I was 17. So, after three months there, I wanted to go home, you know.

So, I got out of there. And I was 17. I had my choice. And they still gave me an honorable discharge.

But they made it, like, virtually impossible to actually go in and finish my, you know. Anyway, I came out.

And now, this is kind of where the fun really began, you know. The encephalitis and everything wasn't enough. And, you know. And God, what I realize now is the Lord was really showing his power.

Like he said to the disciples about the blind man, this was done for the glory of God. So, I look back at my life now and I think, wow, you really, you know.

[8 : 52] So, anyway, I came out of the Army. And I went home.

Now, all the stuff I had bought, because I was paying room and board and everything. So, everything, you know, in there was mine, except for the bed and the refrigerator he gave me. Right? Right? But, while I was gone in the Army, he had a sale and sold everything. So, I had nothing but the clothes on my back.

And I walked in and went in my room, which was like in the, you know, we built, he built rooms underneath.

So, me and my stepbrother stayed there. So, anyway, I went in. Now, it was 11 o'clock at night. And it was empty. But the room was carpeted.

[9 : 50] I was tired. I had my field jacket yet. I just fell, went to sleep on the floor, started to. Then all of a sudden I heard, you know, banging up above me.

Right? Two minutes later, my father swings the door open, has a shotgun pointer at me and says, get the hell out of my house. And so, I guess, you know, that told me I was, you know, kicked out of the house.

I, and so, I really didn't have any friends up there because, you know.

But I did know some people, you know, from Maryland and went to his house. And so, he helped me out one night, you know, without his parents' knowledge.

And because they were in a barn, an old antique barn. So, he snuck me in, you know, a room in the back. And I slept in there.

[10 : 55] And then two weeks later, you know, or the next day we talked to his father. His father, you know, helped me out, you know, with the legal stuff.

And, you know. And then two weeks later, I was sitting there. And I actually watched my sister, my family drive away.

So, I was up there now alone.

And no family. Nothing. So, no, stop.

It's an emotional thing, you know. And I don't, that's why I don't really talk about it a lot. But, so, two weeks later.

[12:10] Now, this is two weeks after, you know, I watched this happen and stuff. He got me, you know, to the state, to a judge in the state.

And the state subpoenaed my father. My father just signed me over to the state now so I could finish up school. So, I went back to school and I was a foster kid for, you know, a couple years. And when I got off foster care, like when you get off foster care, they have like a holding, I call it a holding cell.

But it's a home you live in, you know, so it's not your foster family anymore. And I was there two weeks and happened to be a Baptist preacher.

Now, he didn't speak to me about salvation or anything. But, so, okay, now, you know, the state just kept me loose, right?

[13:21] And now the state, I don't know how they do this. They just let you go and don't help you get started or nothing. So, now, of course, the state of my mind from the disease and the damage it did and everything and everything that happened, now I'm an angry young guy.

And, well, I became desperate, suicidal, cold. And I went for revenge.

I found out where he was and I started, I was going after him. And I, you know, got as far as Akron, Ohio, because that's where he was.

And I was at the Salvation Army. And I don't know what exactly happened, but I just, you know, some guy just said something, man.

It's like scared me. And I just, I'm getting out of here. And I went back, came back to Massachusetts. And now this is, this is May in 78, right?

[14:47] So, I didn't realize why, why am I coming back? I have no family up here, nothing, you know? So, here I am, I'm going back.

Didn't know anyone, no place to stay. So, I'm walking around, you know, and, of course, you know, like, I'm doing my drugs and trying to, you know, end it all.

And, well, there's this bridge in Lowell where I was. And it's kind of high and there's jagged rocks under it and stuff.

And I was just standing there and I was really, you know, going to jump. And I didn't, though.

I was like, what scared me is the thought came to me, what if I don't die? Because I had heard of someone jumping and not dying and he's a vegetable now.

[15:53] And I was like, no. And then I thought, well, maybe I can die. And then, you know, I was just like, I don't know.

I guess I was just chicken. And, well, I know now that, you know, it was God even, you know, tugging you in then.

And so, anyway, I, for some reason that night I just took what I was taking for drugs and I threw them away.

And now I'm really, you know, in despair. And I went and, well, I slept on a park bench that night.

And next morning was Sunday, the second Sunday in June. And I got up and I walked, for some reason, two miles to this Baptist preacher's house.

[17:06] And he opened the door. And I just said, Pastor, I need help. And he brought me in and he told me I could accept Jesus Christ.

And now having, you know, when I was a little kid in Chicago, you know, he said I could accept Jesus Christ.

Now, I was familiar, you know, because my grandfather was a preacher, which, by the way, I thought was pretty cool because he, you know, it's like, wow, he gets to yell at people.

And so, so, so, so he, he said I could accept Jesus Christ.

And I was like, yeah, I need all the help I can get. So he explained to me how, and we prayed a prayer together.

[18:22] And so, so I was baptized that, that day. And then I was with his church for like six months.

And he, you know, suggested I go somewhere else. There was a younger crowd. So, so I went there and I got involved in the bus ministry.

And, you know, and, but then I, I saw like the, I don't know, the leader, the teacher of the bus ministry.

He's one day he's coming out of a bar, you know, and stuff. And I just, I just saw him. And I went home and I fell on my knees and I just prayed, Lord, you know, I can't tell you I'm going to be a great Christian, but I'm going to be honest.

And so anyway, after I was saved too, oh, by the way, before I was saved and became a foster kid, the state of Massachusetts declared me retired.

[19 : 42] And so now I add this label on me. And when I got saved, that was like one of the first things that, that God took away is that label.

Because with that label on me, the state was too much in my life. I couldn't really get, get work and everything else.

And I was getting a meager income from the state. And it's like, man, I kept thinking if this gets off my, you know, I'm not labeled like that.

I can go out, make some, you know, decent money. Well, you know, I want to. And so anyway, now, I took like two years of tests to get this off.

And finally, one test, I found that later, of course, I didn't realize that, but it was an intelligence test.

[20 : 54] And she, she just came back and, and, you know, told me that no one like that is, can be retired.

And so from that day on, the state wouldn't have nothing to do with me, which was cool. It was fine by me, you know, and then, so anyway, now I can, you know, I look back and I can see the steps God took, you know, in my life.

Because, like, the first thing was, like, how I said I was really cold. I developed, you know, a general hatred toward just people, you know, it's, I didn't care.

You know, I just lost everything. It's, so that was like the first thing that God really worked on. And, and then, you know, it wasn't, I didn't quit hanging with the people I was with and stuff.

They quit hanging with me. I was like, because I just wasn't doing it what they, you know, running with them anymore.

[22 : 12] You know, and it's like the Apostle Paul said, you know, or Pete, who was, Peter said, you know, because we don't run to the same excess of riot, they look at that as, you know, negative.

And, so I could just see everything peeling away from my life, you know, and as I grew older in the Lord, you know, I just, you know, enjoyed church and everything.

And, and, in the course of the way God's been teaching me in life, because I look back at it and my life has been like a lot, a lot of kids that are saved and stuff go to college and everything else.

And, I can see, you know, where God, you know, probably different plans for me. Well, he actually did. I'm just, you know, and, because I was, I've been out of work every decade, you know, since, you know, I've been saved.

But, it's been cool, too. I've seen a lot, too. The Lord's really worked mightily in my life. And, that's awesome.

[23 : 39] And, you know, the biggest thing is God gives you the spirit just not to give up.

You know, you lay down and rest in your mind or you give up and God just doesn't leave you there. You know, like, even the children of Israel, you know, when they lost Moses or whatever, you know, they mourned.

But, God wouldn't let them go on mourning. He's okay. Enough's enough. Enough's enough. You know, and so, you know, I could really see that.

And, I just, you know, wanted to love him the best I could, you know.

And, so, anyway, I, you know, I've always, you know, got along with preachers and deacons, you know, and did work at the church and probably not as much as I should.

[24 : 58] And, I've missed opportunities and I haven't taken a lot of opportunities because most of my life, like, people don't really realize this.

But, after a brain disease, when you're, you know, you're young and stuff, you come out, it's like you have, how should I say, like Paul said, a thorn in the flesh.

And, you're saved, yes, you know, it's a spirit that's quickened. The flesh doesn't profit, you know, the spirit sustains the flesh.

And, so, it's still there. But, because, like, I've been invited to missionary trips and invited to speak like I am now and I've always refused, you know.

Of course, I've always had a, you know, worse speech impediment, you know. It's, like, getting pretty good now. And, it was really bad, you know.

[26 : 12] My voice cracked until I was 45 years old. So, my speech is always, you know. So, then, the last, what I think, you know, God was really speaking to my heart is, you know, when the economy started going south.

And, anyway, I lost my job. And, it went on for a while. I lost, you know, quite a bit.

And, I had to claim bankruptcy and lost a car I had just bought, you know, a few years back.

And, so, you know, I was thinking, I really, you know, I was praying about it too. And, I was, I got to do something to at least keep my mind going.

You know. Because, if I don't, I'm going to literally lose it. So, I went back to school, took a few courses. And, now, at the same time, I'm working for myself.

[27 : 29] And, doing a little work here and there. Plus, I'm collecting what unemployment would give me. Which, by the way, God really blessed me on unemployment.

I collected unemployment for, like, four years. And, that's unheard of. I mean, the highest they give you is 99 weeks.

Right? And, I was on it for over 200. So, anyway, the Lord's taking care of everything.

And, now, I went back to school. And, I was doing pretty good. Until, I took psychology. You know.

And, yeah, psychology is like, they take everything from the Bible. And, they just twisted around.

[28 : 29] And, you know, all my, I couldn't deal with it. But, I stuck it out. And, I, you know, finished. It was only a semester.

And, so, that pretty much brings me here. Well, I lost my family back then. I'll just tell you this.

And, I didn't see him again for, like, 10 years. But, my sister hunted down my brother. And, my brother, you know, he had an idea where I was.

So, he just, you know, sent a letter to the election board and got me. So, we had the little reunion.

And, but, we were all settled where we were at that time. So, you know, I didn't come here. So, in a way, this economy gone bad is a blessing.

[29 : 34] You know, I'm down here with my sister. And, but, you know, even that's, you know, not a piece of cake. I mean, she's involved in her own life and everything else.

And, I just want to start, you know, the rest of my days. But, but, but then again, how can any of us say how many days we have, you know?

Because it's not up to us. So, well, anyway, that pretty much sums up everything.

And, well, thank you for listening. So, have any questions? Anyone? How long have you lived here in Ohio, Ron?

And how was it you came here because your sister was here? Yeah. Yeah. Over the years, she's been, we've been talking.

[30 : 38] And, you know, and she's, you ought to come down here. And I kept saying no because, you know, things were going okay for me up there.

I knew people. And, you know, plus the biggest thing is I was saddled up there. Because, I mean, all my life I hadn't really been saddled anywhere.

So, that really made a lot to me. And if I look at that, too, God probably wanted me to get up, like, even 10, 20 years ago and come down here.

You know, and it took this to happen for him to get me moving, you know? And so, I've been here since September 2011.

Do you have any contacts with your father at all? My father was, he passed away in 1986.

[31 : 49] Yeah. So. What were you about to have here? Oh, thank you. They might like to hear how we got to find grace here.

I was, I came down here. I was praying for, you know, to find the church. And, you know, I was going to free will and stuff.

And my sister, you know, the grace here, you had a, where you went and put information on mailboxes and, you know, to invite people out.

And, you know, to find the church. And, you know, to find the church. And she gave it, brought it in and gave it to me. And it really spoke to me.

Because, well, the church I was in up there was Grace Bible Church. And then I started coming here.

[32 : 55] And I wrote the pastor up there. And he had said, well, I'll suggest some down here. Because the pastor up there is from Indiana.

So, he suggested, he gave me a list of three. And Grace was on the list also. And I believe in my heart.

God has me right where he wants me. So, you know, my biggest thing is not to go anywhere. Because it seems God gets you all set up in the path. He wants you to go down. And you start feeling good. And you start going a different way.

You know, so God has to, you know, just pull you back. And depending on how honoring and how stuck you are in your mind, it could hurt one way or the other.

[34 : 02] What about your employment situation now? Oh, I'm working at Ritala and Urbana. And I'm working second shift.

I really don't like the hours. And the work, the work's okay. But I kind of don't feel like I should be doing it.

But it's a job, you know. I pray about it. I'm trying not to go anywhere and wait until God makes it, you know, obvious for me to go.

Because I have a problem, you know. It's like I pray about something and pray about it and pray about it. And it gets so heavy on my mind.

It's like my agenda. And it's probably not even God's agenda for me to be doing that. But I end up putting that before everything else and just make things worse for myself a lot.

[35 : 17] But, you know what, it's, it's, I wouldn't trade, you know, what's happened. Because God teaches me something about myself every, every step I take.

And I'm just so thankful for Jesus Christ. And God got me. I, I'm sorry it was so rough.

But I'm glad, glad he got me. Okay. That's it. Thank you. Do you have a question? Anybody?

Yes. How, um, do you realize how important your testimony would be to young people, and there's so many in our, even in our United States, that are in the same position, maybe not ill, illness-wise, but, you know, the life that you've led, there's so many kids.

It's, it's staggering, the number. Or do you realize what a testimony that would be, you would be to those young people? I, I really didn't until right now.

[36 : 47] I did have an idea, you know, because the Lord's, He's really done miraculously in my life.

And I, you know, did have an idea that it would, is a good testimony to share. But I've always had, like, a block in my brain, because when I was nine years old, I couldn't talk until I was ten and a half. So, I don't know, you know, um, it, it seemed, you know, my brother and sister and stuff and everyone, and they, they didn't really know what happened to me either.

So, you know, what, what happened and how, you know, how they're known so nonchalant about it. You know, it's kind of understandable because you're really only going to understand yourself if you've had such a traumatic thing happen, you know, and, like, the disease is, uh, in stages, too. Now, I was at an acute level with a 20% chance to live. Right? But, depending on how fast they get the disease out, you can have virtually no damage left at all.

[38 : 16] But, I was really, my brain was cooking and... So, the brain's still cooking. What's, uh, what's, uh, and I can see it cooking.

What is your dreams? What would, what do you, what do you see from here? What's God telling you? Uh, well, I'm really not looking ahead.

Because it seems every time I look, look ahead, it's, ends up being my own self that's getting in the way.

So, God's gonna have to just, you know... And, if I'm gonna, you know, if God wants me to do this, you know, speak to people, He's gonna open doors, you know, and it's, it's His Son, Jesus Christ, that is glorified.

And, I'm not gonna, you know, do it myself. In fact, since, since, um, I agreed with Pastor to come and do this, I, I've scared myself a number of times in my, you know, thinking about it.

[39 : 40] And, and I was like, because I was, Pastor wanted me to write some notes. And, I was just sitting back here, and I was like, notes would have been a good idea.

Because, you know, it doesn't hit you that bad until ten minutes before you, you know.

So, does that answer? Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Uh, do you have any idea how you got the encephalitis? Uh, well, they, they say you can get it a couple of ways.

A mosquito, um, result of high temperatures, which is the way they believe I got it, contracted it.
[40 : 46] Yeah. Yeah. Because, uh, if they had caught it earlier, or if they weren't so, so, uh, you know, let's make house calls, you know, and the doctor was a little more aware of the situation, wouldn't have been so bad.

Because, I was, I was at, like, the best hospital in Chicago, Michael Reeks Hospital. And, they got the disease out of me for a month, after a month.

You know, but, the thing is, it was in me a month before I went in the hospital. So, it was probably that first month that, yeah.

Rob, are you still taking kind of medication or anything? No, I never did. I never did. In fact, um, I, I knew some, someone, uh, that was two years older than me.

And, he hadn't said, well, and he ended up with a plate in his brain. And, you know, of course, he had seizures from it and stuff.

[42 : 05] And, I mean, I guess God just knew exactly, you know, when and where and how and what's going to happen.

You know, as I look back at it, and you can, I can pick out God's steps in my life every, you know, every day.

Thank you, Ron. Uh, sorry. Thank you, Ron. I appreciate it very much.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Ron. Thank you, Ron. Thank you, Ron.

Thank you. Reminded a little bit of Travis Neff because it is remarkable how many relatively simple things could be taken care of if only there was a timely diagnosis.

[43 : 11] But sometimes diagnosis escapes people and the disease just ravages on. And then when it is diagnosed, there often is some very serious damage done in the meanwhile.

So thank you again for being here. Thank you for being a part of grace. And now when you see this man standing out in the hall, he will not just be some guy that talks funny. I trust that you will have much better understanding, appreciation for him.

And you know, everybody has a story. Everybody has a story. And every heart has some aches. And it ought to make us be more compassionate, more sympathetic, more understanding to one another.

Because we all have our flaws, our weaknesses, our struggles, our hang-ups, our prejudices, and all the rest that goes with it.

It's just part of the human predicament. And Ron and his family situation is one of the very things that is literally tearing this country apart.

[44 : 22] That fractured families and fractured relationships and broken families, broken marriages, broken everything. The gospel remains the only real satisfying answer.

That's for certain. Would you stand with me, please? Father, we are once again in awe of your great grace and the way you orchestrate events and the way you reveal yourself to each of us in so many different capacities in different times.

We are grateful that you are never 30 seconds early nor 30 seconds late. Thank you for being the God of grace and thank you for having worked in Ron Zilt's life and for the opportunity that each of us have had today to see in another human being the grace of God in operation.

We bless you for it in Christ's wonderful name. Amen.