

Larry Tomczak's Testimony

About His Reconciliation with CJ Mahaney

July 4, 2011

I would like to take a few moments to share with you a testimony of God's grace in my life, in my family, and in a very dear relationship. About 38 years ago CJ Mahaney and I were brought together in a complementary friendship and teaching ministry in the nation's Capitol. We started with a handful of people in the home of Mrs. Lydia Little, who called us together and was the initial catalyst for our ministry. We began to study the Word of God, then we began to teach the Word of God in a more public fashion. Our group grew within a four-year period to almost 2,000. It was primarily young people meeting every Tuesday for a ministry meeting called "T.A.G.," or Take and Give. We taught the Scriptures, worshipped the Lord, and saw multitudes of people converted. Even to this day, wherever we travel in this nation and abroad, both CJ and I hear testimonies of people who thank us for our teaching. We've been amazed at how God used that ministry, which was both a personal journey toward God and a revival that touched many lives.

As our ministry grew, we complemented each other—we were very different. In 1977 we realized it was God's will to conclude the teaching and evangelistic gatherings and begin to plant a New Testament church. We tried to do it in a way that was non-divisive and began in my home. Over the course of a year or two, a church was started that is now Covenant Life Church. Thirty-some years later it is a prosperous local church in the Gaithersburg MD area, with about 3,000+ members.

As the church grew, we also caught a vision for church-planting and multiplication according to the pattern in the Book of Acts. Over the course of two decades we were privileged to be involved in planting or "adopting" about 25 churches. This fellowship of churches eventually became known as "Sovereign Grace Ministries." We were also involved with a nationally-published magazine, *People of Destiny*, which 20-25,000 people received.

But somewhere in the 1990's God put a test before us. I'm sorry to say that we didn't come through with flying colors. We wanted the ministry's core values and beliefs to be more specifically identified. That brought about some friction, because I found myself going on a different doctrinal path than some of the other leaders who were dear friends. As time went by I felt I was experiencing abuses of spiritual authority and methodologies that were harmful and inconsistent with Scripture. Other leaders in SGM shared similar experiences with me. Because of this, as well as some pruning the Lord was doing in my personal life in terms of character, and some family issues with one of our children, CJ and I reached a place where there was not just tension, but an impasse. Eventually there was a sense in my own heart to end my time with the ministry. I felt there were issues of doctrine and direction in the ministry with which I could no longer align. As I attempted to exit, it caused tension and things did not go well for us.

For the past 13 years, CJ and I have been in a state of estrangement. I made several attempts to address these differences and to deal with offenses and perceived injustices. Both of us sought to apply principles of biblical peacemaking, but we made little progress. We struggled unsuccessfully to overcome separation, alienation, and division. We certainly did not give a positive witness for the

Lord. The ripples of our separation went through the Body of Christ in many ways, effecting extended family members, churches, and individual church members.

In September 2010, I sent a letter to CJ requesting that we come together again to try to reconcile with each other. CJ gladly agreed and flew to Nashville where we met and talked for over four hours. Early in the meeting, we considered two specific questions:

First, what is God calling us to do that would bring Him the maximum glory, bring healing to the maximum number of people, and stop the ongoing divisive activity of Satan in the maximum number of individuals and churches?

Second, are we willing to do whatever He reveals no matter what the cost?

We both gave a thumbs up and a hearty Amen and said, “Let's dig in.” We put into practice the wisdom of Proverbs 14:9, “Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright.” By God’s grace, we worked hard at repairing our relationship. CJ confessed and repented of sins that had caused separation between us. Where I had also sinned and failed, I did likewise. I was deeply moved by CJ’s humility and transparency, and would give him an “A+” on his role in the conversation.

Realizing that my wife Doris had also been affected by our estrangement, CJ offered to meet with her as well. A few weeks later, he returned and she joined us for another four hour conversation. As a result of prayer and fasting and the grace of God, we saw the Holy Spirit doing a work in our midst that I would have to say was miraculous. I believe that all of us pleased the Lord by not being defensive, by listening to one another, by attempting to understand the past and lay it out on the table, with nothing ignored or neglected.

But God was not done with us yet. Doris' father is 89 and her mother is 87, and CJ knew that they too had been impacted by our struggles. To our great joy and appreciation, he humbled himself and called them on Christmas Eve. In their words, “in a pile of tears” he sought forgiveness and expressed repentance. It was an incredible experience as God brought healing in a situation that my wife had said two months before was irreparable. Ripples went out to our entire extended family. One family member who was involved in the situation subsequently flew to meet with us in Nashville. We were able to discuss things and he repented and asked our forgiveness. We also acknowledged some failures at this time.

CJ also had a private meeting with one of our children and was a model of humility in listening and dealing with issues he wanted to discuss. A breakthrough came when he humbly asked forgiveness for an offense that had deeply hurt my child, Doris, and me. This evidence of God’s reconciling grace was crucial to our eventual reconciliation.

During this six month period, several SGM leadership couples called us or visited us in Nashville, at great financial cost, to likewise repent and seek forgiveness for sins against us and our family. Some called our children to do likewise. Many tears and lots of pain came to the surface, but this brought great glory to God and was essential to the healing process for our family. It also gave us the

opportunity to confess and ask forgiveness for our contributions to our estrangement. The efforts by SGM leadership couples to seek reconciliation ushered in the healing for things that had affected all of us for thirteen years and had negatively impacted many of our children.

At this point we are all standing in amazement that after 13 years the Holy Spirit moved into our lives as we humbled ourselves for what we would call a transformational experience. Where sin had once separated us, the grace of Christ now brought us all together in a spirit of love and forgiveness. We were all impacted—not only us, but also our children and extended family members. We believe this is going to reverberate throughout Covenant Life Church, the ministry of Sovereign Grace Ministries, and also individuals who have been aware of this ministry here and abroad. Doris' dad and mom said, “We're ready now to be with the Lord, for we have seen the intervention of God.”

I praise God that CJ and I are now able to communicate the wonderful news of our reconciliation to those who would be encouraged by it. We have agreed that we don't need to go into specifics, but we can tell anybody and everybody that we came together, every major issue was put on the table, we endeavored to humbly repent, ask forgiveness, and honor God by forgiving. We want to move forward now and see healing, not only in our lives and families but in the churches and ministries that in any way, shape or form were impacted by what took place.

Praise be to God, who has graciously overcome and delivered us from our sin and given us the grace to experience the forgiveness and reconciliation that Christ won for us at the Cross!