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Today is my spiritual birthday. 40 years ago I woke up in the morning a sophomore in college, disengaged with God, ignoring Him like I had for years, but when I went to bed that night my entire world and eternity had changed forever. In the middle of the day, a classmate handed me a flyer, inviting me to a performance of an illusionist/magician, André Kole. I was intensely interested, being a fan of illusion, but when the flyer revealed the event was sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ, I said to myself, "Forget it." I was *not* interested in hanging with Jesus freaks! But as the day wore on, it felt like there was a string tied around my heart, drawing me to that evening's performance.

So I went.

And André Kole used magic to illustrate spiritual principles that made sense to me, especially when he talked about every human being having a God-shaped hole in our hearts that we try to stuff with anything *but* God: good grades, reputation, relationships, appearance, money, attention, achievements. He explained how God had sent Jesus to earth to show us what He was like, and then Jesus died on the cross to deal with our sin once and for all. Three days later God raised Him from the dead and He's still alive today, unlike the founder of any other world religion. If I trusted in Jesus, He would come to live inside me forever and He, being God, would fill that God-shaped hole and I could experience the "abundant life" He came to bring us (John 10:10). I remember thinking, "YES!!" and threw open the door of my heart to Him, placing myself in Jesus' hands and trusting Him with my life and my future.

I had no idea what that meant. I just knew it was right.

Life became a perpetual surprise box as God started making changes in me from the inside out. To my delight, I discovered that all the things I really liked about myself then, and even moreso as forty years have unfolded, were the things that God put in me. He gave me a depth of joy that I didn't know was possible. He planted spiritual gifts in me that were the manifestation of His Holy Spirit shining through the window of my life: gifts of shepherd/teacher, of encouragement, of word of wisdom, all of which came straight from His heart into mine. He continued to shape the personality and temperament He had given me with maturity and seasoning. He made my heart a big pipe through which He poured His love into other people.



I remember one time a couple of months into my new life, discovering a different kind of fellowship with other Christ-followers and a love for God's word as I started being taught the Bible and learning to teach others what I was learning, wondering if this cool new life would last or if it was just some sort of fad. I didn't know that God was *transforming* me, giving me a taste for His life and His kingdom that would spoil me for any counterfeit the world had to offer. He

opened my eyes to be aware of the spiritual realm, not just the physical realm I lived in, and enlarged my understanding to include the Big Picture of life on earth and in eternity. I learned that my life wasn't about me at all, it was about Jesus, and because He loved me, He had drawn me into His life, His circle of delight and fellowship with His Father and His Spirit—that I was now included into the “holy hug” of Father, Son and Spirit who had adopted me, and I was now a daughter of the King—which makes me a forever princess! Forty years later, I still revel in that gift, and I love to pull out a tiara and pop it on my head when I'm sharing my story of grace with people.

When I was a little girl I just wanted to be happy when I grew up. Who doesn't, right? But what I discovered is that God had His definition of happy—blessed—plus so much more. He gave me Himself, and all the good things of life are found in Him.

Happy birthday to Jesus-in-me! My heart is overflowing with unspeakable gratitude!

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