

Story of Faith: Liz Stillerman Anderson

I grew up in the church. I attended Sunday school; went to Adventure Club and Vacation Bible School; visited Montreat in the summers and fall; had a group of close friends in the church who I completed confirmation with; was a member of the Youth Group; and eventually served as a youth elder. Because of this, faith has always been more of a given to me than anything else. It wasn't until I became an adult that all of the lessons learned in the church would come back to me in ways that were more significant than they had been to me as a child. When I was asked to share my story of faith, I wasn't quite sure where to start, but finally, I realized that my story of faith has everything to do with gratitude.

When I was in middle school and going through confirmation, I remember that we spent a lot of time talking about Presbyterianism and the concept of "pre-destination." The question my group kept asking: If we're all pre-destined, then what's the point?" I'm sure our confirmation leader gave a very thoughtful and intelligent answer, but all I remember was him saying was that "the point of it all" was to live our lives in gratitude for all that we had been given.

This deeper version of gratitude that we talked about in confirmation came back to me when I was in college, and I studied abroad in Jerusalem, Israel. The people I met on that trip treated me such kindness and patience, even though I was very unfamiliar with Israeli culture and Jewish customs. My friend Yael took me to the store when I wasn't able to read simple Hebrew words yet and told me where the shampoo was and helped me to buy basic food. My friend Jessica would whisper the appropriate Jewish prayers to me, as I washed my hands at a Chabad Rabbi's house, so as not to offend him. And finally, my friend Rachel let me tag along with her everywhere and always made sure I had somewhere to spend Shabbat. It wasn't until I returned home, that I realized how grateful I was to all of these people for helping me. Their willingness to share their faith with me, helped me to deepen my relationship with my own. This deepened sense of gratitude re-surfaced again a few years ago when I was dealing with some health issues. Once a plan was put into place for how I would get better, I remember feeling so grateful for my life, my health, my family, and the people around me who were so supportive. The feeling was overwhelming.

These days, even when things are tough, I continue to look for places to find and share gratitude. I continue to give thanks for my life and those around me, and I am always trying to show gratitude with my actions.

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! – Psalm 95:2