



# An Open Heaven!

*Testimony by Mary Yoder*

My desire in sharing this is not to write my life story or to evoke pity, but rather to exalt God and to testify of what He can do when we lay aside all the fears and doubts and shame and choose to do what it takes to get right with him. I want it to be a message of hope to hurting souls, it doesn't matter how low you have fallen, God can change you into a completely different person with a new identity!

Also, I desire this to be a grave warning to parents of the devastating things that can happen to children when they are left to themselves. Parents, do not think that cousins or children from your church are safe playmates for your children. Most children, if left unsupervised will get into trouble, it only takes a moment to lose innocency.

Please pray for me, that I can continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus. ~Mary Yoder

**I**t is with great joy and praise to the Lord Jesus that I share this testimony. My desire is to lift up God's mighty protection, His merciful forgiveness, His saving grace, transforming power, and unfailing faithfulness throughout my life. He is my best Friend.

I was born and raised in an Amish home, we later joined a conservative Mennonite church, I was the tenth child in a family of twelve. We were a very average family, our parents taught us many good things and we always had family devotions. I have many good memories of normal childhood activities such as climbing trees, playing dolls, fishing, etc. However somehow in my earliest, most tender years

the devil got a hold of my heart and mind, twisting them and robbing me of my carefree innocence, creating burdens that were too heavy for little shoulders to carry. I cannot even remember a time when insecurities, depression and perversion did not shadow my life. I was a very shy, sensitive little girl. I would cry for hours for no particular reason, I just felt sad and miserable.

As I got older my shyness turned to boldness and I learned how to charm people with a sweet smile and friendly attitude so that they wouldn't know how wretched I was inside. I was extremely self-centered and usually got what I want-

ed either by being “cute” or begging until everyone was sick of me and gave me what I wanted to quiet my whining. When I started school a whole new world of friends and information opened up to me several times a week I would spend the afternoon/evening with a friend or cousin playing unsupervised for hours at a time. We spent many days running through the woods engaging in harmless, wholesome play. However we fell into some very wicked, impure things. Being the “wild child” that I was, I probably instigated most of the inappropriate and perverted things we did.

No one ever paid enough attention to us little girls to notice anything; I was a talented liar and very secretive. So I’m sure I could have figured out a way to get us out of any trouble and probably made us look like the good guys as well, which did in fact happen many times. When I got into a tight spot my motto basically was, hide what you can, lie about the rest. I had a lot of anger and frustration in my heart that just kept growing and growing. This manifested itself in fighting. My sister and I constantly fought until we bled. I fought at school as well, especially with the boys if they crossed my path. Hot anger would just boil over and spew onto the unfortunate offender, which I greatly enjoyed. Sometimes I fought for the sheer joy of tearing into some one and venting some of the anger inside. Another problem I had at school was stubbornness. I had the ability to be a straight A student but I hated being told what to do. So many times I just spaced out and daydreamed instead of doing my work, leaving lots of it only partly done.

Around the age of seven I started feeling strong desired to kill myself. I often wrote out suicide notes to my family telling them that I just ended it all because I was so unhappy. After a while I would take the note I had written and flush it down the toilet so no one would find it. I turned to food for comfort, eating and eating till my little tummy was stuffed. I ate whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, exercising no self-control.

One Sunday morning as I was walking to church with some of my older siblings I was lagging behind by myself when suddenly, in the ditch I saw this tiny little booklet. I thought it was cute so I snatched it up and slipped it into my pocket. It was full of evil and the devil used it to twist and defile my mind into homosexuality. I cannot describe the devastation that this caused in my heart. I disposed of the little book soon because of the guilt and fear of being found out but the effects lingered on for many years.

All the time these things were going on I was a sweet compliant little girl on the outside and no one had a clue about the things that I was involved in. The story of my life was hiding, hiding, hiding. I had

so many secrets, but no one thought anything of it because after all don’t all little girls love to giggle and to have secrets?

At the age of eleven my family moved two hours away to start a new church, so I was removed from all my friends and secret hideouts. After we moved there were several years that kind of just passed. I remember very little about those years except that I was getting more numb to my feelings until I finally reached a point where I thought that I didn’t have emotions any more. I covered all this up with foolishness and laughter. When I was fifteen I wanted to be born again so one night I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart. This made me feel better for a little while and I got baptized into the church. We had the plan of salvation clearly preached at church but I didn’t really understand repentance plus I had bondages that couldn’t be broken simply by a little prayer prayed by myself. The good feelings wore off quickly and with it came a deep dark depression. All the things I had experienced in my childhood returned with such intensity I felt like I was being overpowered and suffocated. It was like a dark heavy cloud was pressing down on me physically and mentally.

My heart was so full of anger and hatred it felt like I was going to burst. I began to abuse myself, just pouring out the rage on my own body, I yearned for death. All my thoughts were basically centered upon the driving desire to just end it all. I started experiencing severe chest pains so sharp and strong they took my breath away. It was diagnosed as panic attacks and I was put on medication. Over the next year I was on so many different medications I don’t even remember what they all were. All these medications just fried my brain and my body. The majority of my time was spent locked in my bedroom sleeping or contemplating suicide but once again my God so mercifully intervened and I never did it.

My doctor had done everything she could and I wasn’t getting better. She finally referred me to a psychiatrist so that I could be monitored more closely. I panicked because I was afraid they would put me in a hospital or something so I got my mom to tell them that we would find another place to go for counseling. My brother-in-law so kindly arranged for me to go to Deeper Life Ministries in OH. I was there for four weeks but I refused to cooperate and to be totally honest with my counselor so they really couldn’t help me very much. After I left DLM I was so psyched I just went crazy. My life was miserable I had no purpose or goals except to feed my flesh. That summer I spent four months in Milbank, SD, with my married sister who had six children. I was very needed, there were only a couple young families and it was in the middle of gardening and canning season.

Those months were spent in the heat, baby-sitting, cleaning, weeding corn and canning peaches etc. It was extremely good for me and I was actually able to get off of my antidepressants.

In September I went back to NC and my sister Amy and I decided to attend Charity youth Bible School. We had no idea what we were getting into, Praise God! I was in shock the whole week I had never in my life been in a crowd like this. There were so many godly youth with clear faces, they were open and honest, sharing their hearts and loving each other. I just observed in quiet amazement and in my heart I knew this was it, this was the truth and freedom that I wanted, I knew that someday I would have it. As we were leaving Bible School I looked at Amy and said, "Amy some day I'm going to live here." After we got home I tried so hard to live a victorious Christian life. I read my Bible more and prayed more but I had not had a heart change and I felt no real connection to God, so as the excitement of Bible School wore off so did my Christianity.

Through out the next year I tried several times to get right with God. I had some contact with Mel and Barbie Esh, which was a tremendous blessing, but I never could bring myself to confess everything that I had been involved in. So I would feel better for awhile and then crash again. There were so many things I didn't understand and I believe that God was using these things to prepare my heart and to bring me to a point of desperation.

In August of 2002, God in His great wisdom and mercy opened the doors for me to move to PA and to live with David and Cherie Cooper. I lived with them for seven life-changing months. Here I was, a Mennonite girl, depressed, proud, willful and fiercely independent dropped into the middle of a family I had never met and who can be best described as the Godly Home tape series in action. I want to take this opportunity to bless the entire Cooper family for the love and patience that they extended to me through those turbulent months of adjustments and homesickness. Thank-you!

As the first several weeks in PA rolled by I began doubting my conversion more and more. I seemed that the harder I tried the more miserable I became. Then Bible School came around and I was encouraged to spend time in prayer and fasting to prepare my heart. Well, pray and fast I did. I cried out to God as I had never done before, pleading and begging Him to save me and set me free. Somehow I had a feeling that something would happen at Bible School, then God told me that when the time was right, Bro. Mose would be the one He was going to use. So I began to pray specifically for Bro. Mose that God would give him wisdom and show him what questions to ask me.

I was so afraid I wouldn't have the courage to confess everything but I wanted to, desperately.

The first day of Bible School finally came and as I opened the schedule Bro. Denny's title 'Freedom from Bondage' jumped out. I immediately knew this was going to be the key. I sat through Monday and Tuesday's messages with my heart wide open. After Tuesday's message I said "OK God, I'm ready to do whatever it takes. Please just send Bro. Mose to me." Only minutes after I had breathed that little prayer, I met up with Bro. Mose and after talking for several minutes we arranged to meet during the evening service.

We met that evening along with another godly couple. As we talked and Bro. Mose started asking questions everything just came spilling out. I told and told until I couldn't think of one more thing. We then got on our knees and the two brothers laid their hands on me and prayed in the name of Jesus, rebuking the devil who had harassed and oppressed me for so many years. After that I prayed, confessing my sins and trusting God to forgive and wash me clean. In the name of Jesus I renounced all the bondages of depression, suicide, homosexuality, and other demonic activity. I meant every word that I prayed and I believed with my whole heart. As I left the room that evening the realization of what had happened slowly dawned on me and my heart just overflowed with joy. Truly old things had become new.

I had a believer's baptism several weeks later as a public testimony to the death of my old man and the resurrection of a new creature in Christ. Three years have passed since the Lord Jesus saved my soul and He has been so faithful to me since then. He has completely delivered me from the bondages of my past life. I can say what Paul said in Philippians 3:13-14, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth into those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." By the grace of God I can walk with a clear conscience and an open heaven. I have discovered the liberation that comes from living open and honestly before God and man. Because of Jesus I can face the future with joy and anticipation knowing that God in His infinite wisdom has a plan for my life and I can rest in Him. In the past couple months God has been dealing with some things in my life, gently teaching and guiding me to set my heart on higher things. My desire is to live my whole life in complete abandonment to the Lord Jesus, poured out like wine. □

*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing. Revelation 5:12*