

Being WITH God



I grew up in South Africa, the second-born of three children. I had a fairly traditional childhood. My dad was the Head Elder of our church and I was always a very obedient child. Generally, I didn't ask a lot of questions or cause a lot of problems. It was the same with my faith. I just did what I was told, without question. I was one of those children who at the end of the day would try to remember everything I had done wrong so it could be confessed and forgiven when I prayed that night.

It wasn't until I was in my 20's that I explored other things a little bit. I still went to church because that was the habit and that was the expectation, but I wouldn't be able to say I had relationship with God—just rituals and rules.

My wife and I would attend church and Jenny was baptised into the Adventist church after going through all the Bible studies. Both my boys were raised in a really strict Adventist tradition, teaching them the *do's and don'ts*, as I tried to live the right way. But again it was all just living by the *rules*, devoid of real relationship with Jesus.

When we moved to New Zealand it wasn't just the country that was foreign but church was very foreign, especially here at Papsda. I was drawn to this church for the sake of my children, but for me, each weekend held tension and turmoil and questions over the SDA *standards* that I had grown up with and that were so deeply entrenched in my *God ritual experience*. It was a variety of things that made me uncomfortable—the music, the worship style, the informality (I mean what is a man supposed to do with a suitcase full of ties?). I would come into church but I wouldn't really want to be here.

When my mother passed away I sunk into a deep depression. So deep, that I had to take a year off work. During this time I started doing Bible studies with Richard Newson, and I discovered a lot, but when work started again, the routine changed and the spiritual growth spurt that had began, quickly halted. One afternoon I took my dog for a walk on the beach and I was feeling particularly down. I remember standing on the beach shouting at God. Questioning things—asking for answers—no longer content to go through the motions when my life was so unsatisfactory to me.

In August 2014 my wife and I separated after a long while of trying to make things work. This was where I really learnt to lean on God. I remember being so fearful that this would trigger more depression for me, so I began to call on God. In big ways and small ways He just kept on answering and providing for me and for my family. As I began to explore this relationship with God again it seemed like another growth spurt was

happening. It seemed like God was planning little defining moments, as turning points to reveal Himself to me.

I began to talk to Pastor Norman and we looked at Spiritual Pathways. I started to discover the ways I really connected with God. I began to find healing in ways I never knew. I started to feel connection with God and other people. What had once felt like a trap was starting to feel like freedom. Slowly I discovered a life with God that meant I was no longer a slave to the rules. My life was changing simply by being *with* God.

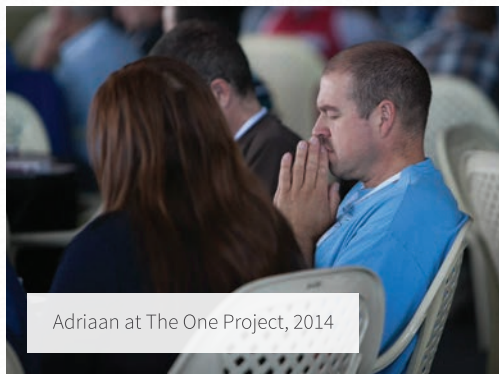
I heard about *The One Project* (a Christ-centred gathering) coming to Auckland and was curious. I wanted to go and participate in the discussion and

the worship but at the time I really couldn't afford to go. I don't know what came over me but I wrote to one of the organisers in Sydney expressing my interest and telling him of my limitations with money. He told me to not worry about it and that he would sponsor me. So I went to *The One Project*. That weekend was another experience that transformed my way of seeing God and

what relationship with Him looks like. I engaged in meaningful discussions and responded in worship in a way I hadn't experienced before. This helped me consolidate the truth that it really was all about Jesus and not about how well I could keep the rules, but how well *He* kept them and how much He loves me.

As I continue to grow, my dream for my boys is that they would walk in and experience freedom in their relationship with Christ. Today, I serve God, rather than focus on standards. I choose relationship over rules. Instead of the ritual of worship I have my eyes fixed on the God whom I worship. Baggage is starting to come off me as I step into the freedom He bought me.

My name is **Adriaan van der Merwe** and I am saved by grace. I am free.



Adriaan at The One Project, 2014

