

Relating personal experience and Christian testimonies can really be helpful—especially when the story can be truly relevant to the hearer. The Apostle Paul actually did this very well from multiple directions, like when he diminished his personal standing while elevating God! Here Paul is, in Philippians 3:8-10...

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.” Wow, that from one of the most highly impactful people in world history!

Today, I’m sharing an event from when I was in grade school because that personal experience reveals one instance as to how God works through and in people. This episode is part of the “about” series profiling persons—and this time it’s “about Steven Edwards.” Now, there’s no reason at all for you to know this particular guy named Steven Edwards. He passed away in 2022 at the age of 67 and lived virtually his whole life in a small town of 3,000 people or so situated on the high plains in Eastern Colorado.

[His story](#) is a narrative that includes a number of people investing in his life: his family, especially his humble parents Merle and Alberta Edwards who adopted Steven as an infant...his employers and bosses like Gordie Schmidt over the years...and a persevering local nonprofit, Dynamic Dimensions Inc., that has served intellectually and developmentally disabled adults like Steven in its community for almost 50 years.

I left my hometown after childhood and quite deficiently lost track of Steven Edwards. But when I was in elementary school, I knew Steven Edwards very well. We lived on the same block in our small town, across the street and three houses down. I knew him as “Stevie” ...and, for several years, he was one of my close buddies. Now Stevie was what Americans today would likely call a “special needs” kid. And Stevie was simply one of the most “pure,” most joyful people I have ever known. Stevie and I spent meaningful time with each other in our backyards, doing some of the silly things that many kids of that era did.

But here’s the fascinating thing that happened. One chilly November late-afternoon nightfall, Stevie and I started a game of hide-and-seek. But there was a problem: Stevie did not have it in him to deceive me by deliberating hiding from me. You see, he simply didn’t “get it.” Yeah, for sure, Stevie would joyously hoot and holler when I hid and then appeared to him from behind a big shrub—but he couldn’t bring himself to deceive me by hiding! In short, *Stevie’s heart literally wasn’t geared to hiding from me!* Instead, his full goal was to fellowship with me...to engage...to be an open book...to enjoy relationship. You see, Stevie’s brain wasn’t engaged with deception and separation—his heart was overriding his brain...yes, his heart was fully engaged with friendship and intimacy...with no room for hiding and deceiving!

Nowadays, I find the parallels of this isolated event with Stevie to the story of the Garden of Eden striking! Adam and Eve enjoyed an innocent, open, heartfelt, loving relationship with God. But after the Fall, they hid from God! No longer innocent...yeah, no longer full to the brim with the prospect of a newly refreshed, anticipatory relationship with their absent Loving One—they actually hid from God! But here’s the twist: God was still seeking after Adam and Eve *even though they were hiding*. Now that’s the signature event in all the history of hide-and-seek!

Now, this state of “hiding” is the definitive posture of any non-Christian. Whether through fear or denial or attempting to crowd Christ out with religious ideas and practices, they do not confess and repent of their sins, and refuse to come face-to-face with God. But praise be to God, 1 John 9 (ESV) tells us that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” *Not hiding from God is the key to freedom!*

Of course, even striving believers do sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)...but there’s no condemnation in Christ! (Romans 8:1-2) But here’s the thing, even Christians can still kinda work to “hide” from Christ by relentlessly claiming the mantle of a sinner—as if wallowing in sin glorifies God! Well,

there's an answer to that: "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." (Colossians 3:9-10) Yes, put off the old self, put on the new self—there's no benefit to hide from Christ *in whom there is no condemnation!*

And that brings us back to the event of Stevie...and my response. I was not a Christian, nor really even a serious churchgoer, but God surely used Stevie that late afternoon. Suddenly, I thought of God for the first real time in my life—and here's what dawned on me immediately, a bit like a thunderbolt...

*No one is inherently "better" or more moral than Stevie Edwards, no matter what a perceived lack of his abilities might be. In fact, Stevie had the right answer to our "hide and seek" activity at that very moment—he didn't want to deceive someone he was in joyful relationship with...even if it was just part of a game!*

Then here was the clincher for me...

*I suddenly understood that God evaluates everyone on the same playing field. The reality was that I was trying to teach Stevie how to deceive well—even if it was just a game. And Stevie had a great response...he softly resisted, successfully so...in fact, so successfully so that I'm communicating his story decades later.*

Soon, the day turned fully to night, and I went into my house to see my mother, herself not yet a believer in Christ. I immediately told her the story, and she was quite reflective in hearing the "Stevie event" and my conclusions. The reality was—it helped re-vector my inner life. But...it still did take over a decade after that before I responded to the Gospel. Nonetheless, Stevie was hugely used by God in my life.

You see, I knew before the Stevie event that there was a Creator in line with Paul's writing in Romans 1—after all, I grew up where hardy but still puny men and women are dwarfed by an impossibly vast sky and are helpless in massive blizzards and destructive hailstorms! Yes, in such ways and much more, the Creator's hand in all creation is clearly evident. But Stevie was used by God to reveal a superior approach at another level—yes, *to not use deception to gain advantage, even when it was just part of a seemingly harmless game.* Stevie helped "till my soil" so that I was better ready to respond to the Gospel years later—that's right, the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24) that requires a "soil" that's ready to hear.

This entire "Stevie event" was obviously highly impactful for me. But it's also instructive for us all. Virtuous actions are best effective locally and, when God chooses to use them, they can impact profoundly in ways we could not possibly project or even really plan for. I am convinced that believers with high impact will not fully find out *in this life* how they may have impacted people for God's purposes. So, why might that be? I suspect that God often withholds success stories to keep people from a hindering pridefulness.

Nevertheless, I don't or won't hesitate to tell this "Stevie story" to parents of children who have real disabilities or grave illnesses. The examples of such parents and the children themselves often speak volumes by their amazing responses to the struggles of life. I would guess that someone you know has probably impacted you like that. And just like Stevie's story, it can often have a compounding effect! Wow.

You've likely heard the story of the boy who was rescuing one starfish at a time at the beach, throwing each back into the ocean from the midst of thousands of starfish who were stranded. An old man watching the boy do that pointed out the futility of rescuing just one starfish in the midst of the thousands on shore. Whereupon the boy picked up a starfish, threw it into the ocean and said, "it mattered to that one!" Yes.

But what I'm also interested in here is the starfish we won't even know about until the Judgment Seat of Christ where God rewards the works of those already saved by God's grace. (1 Corinthians 3:9-16) You see, the more we are like Christ, the more God can reveal Himself through us, and if we're really blessed, God won't tell us about it till later, much later! *Let God count your starfish!* So...

Are you born again, with a heart full of God...but perhaps using your brain to try to finagle to get your way at the expense of a righteous heart? Yeah, Romans 12:2 instructs us to "renew our minds." Let's do that.

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Is your daily reality that you are consistently trying to hide from God by identifying as a “sinner saved by grace” rather living than an authentic, victorious life by putting on the new self in Christ? Discuss.
2. Have you ever found yourself in an important situation or two where, as a follower of Christ, it was tempting to put the “old self” back on? How did you handle that...for better or for worse? Be specific.
3. Have you experienced a “Stevie Edwards event” that happened to you in your life? Consider giving an account of that to others. And consider reconnecting with your “Stevie” and telling them thanks. And consider telling others who might find great encouragement from your “Stevie” story.