

Merlinda's Testimony

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Merlinda's life was a real struggle since she was young. Her father passed away unexpectedly, and her mother also decided to leave all her five younger children behind to start her new life alone. Melinda had, ever since, been looking after her siblings. Due to emptiness and unfavorable circumstances in life, Melinda decided to marry at an early age to survive and care for her younger brother and sisters.

Being married at a very young age, Merlinda did not understand much the dynamics of relationship. She was struggling to provide for her siblings as well as her own family in the urban area of Ilog, Negros Occidental, Central Philippines. Therefore, when Merlinda heard about a care group meeting dubbed as *Family Relationship* by a Seventh-day Adventist Church, she decided to attend hoping that the information she received would help in her family relationship.

Attending the meetings about *Family Relationship* changed Merlinda's life completely. She had learned, not only being loving to all family members, but also being loving to God. Out of joy, she discussed her new-found faith with her daughter, who, in turn responded positively. Her son and husband, on the other hand, reacted unfavorably and was very doubtful of her new community of faith. They strongly opposed her when she expressed her desire to be baptized. Merlinda was caught in a dilemma. It was not easy to go against the opposition that came from both her son and her husband.

At the end of *Family Relationship* meeting, Merlinda decided to share her dilemma and difficult situation to the pastor. The pastor prayed with and encouraged her to ask God to direct her path. At the end, even without her son and her husband's consent, Merlinda decided to follow the Lord. She picked herself up, walked back home, and returned with a set of clothes to be exchanged after baptism.

A greater temptation and mental challenge came after Melinda's baptism. Her son overheard her admission of being a baptized member of Seventh-day Adventist Church, and he became very upset. He informed her husband who also turned furious. Since then, Merlinda had become the target of their scorn and

ridicule due to her new faith; they repeatedly accused her. They frequently blamed that her decision to be baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a great shame to the entire family. With such contemptuous comments, she was living her life in great distress, experiencing sleepless nights continually. The relationship distance got bigger and wider between them. To her despair and hopelessness of redeeming their family relationship, Merlinda felt overwhelmed and began contemplating on suicide as the only solution to the existing problem.

One night Merlinda decided to end her misery. She took out a knife planning to stab herself. Her youngest son unexpectedly woke up and stopped her from suicide attempt. He was begging her to live because he loved her. This had woken up her conscience. She tearfully promised him that she would never again think about hurting herself. She realized fully now that she could hurt and inflict much pains to those who loved and valued her.

A deep spiritual sense awakening occurred in Melinda's heart after the incident. Through youngest son's appeal, she sensed that God had spoken to her directly. He had sent a very important message through her dear youngest son. God wanted her to realize how precious and valuable she was to Him, and bounced up from living in despair. Melinda never felt that peaceful state and calmness before. With the comfort she had received deep down in her heart, she kept going to church and maintaining her faith and trust in God. She never failed in studying the Bible lessons to seek God's assurance. Although being neglected and subject of mockery due to her faith daily, she never gave up performing her duties as a good wife and a caring mother. She kept praying earnestly for each member of her family, especially her older son and husband – and God heard them.

"I was surprised on that day when my son came home and handed all his salary to me," Melinda said proudly with a big smile. "He even told me to iron his clothes." This was the first kind gesture that she received from her son since her baptism. It was a miracle to Merlinda because her son refused to speak kindly to her for a long time. Her husband had also turned his cold shoulders on her; but lately, he seemed to be nice again in his way of speaking and treating her. Merlinda was overjoyed with the confirmation that the Lord heard her unceasing prayers.

Melinda continues to praise to God and gives thanks to Him. He did not abandon her nor left her to face the temptations alone. She realizes now that God was always watching her and saw every drop of her tears that she shed because of her faith and trust in Him. Merlinda's entire family now goes along with her to the same church on Sabbath. There are blessings that keep coming her way. She is always joyful because she has learned to count them all!