

Though all who say we are Christian profess a belief in God, over the course of our lives due to the decisions we make, and also due to life circumstances and the actions of others, it can be easy to become lost.

Such was the case for LuLu Roman, a woman who went on to have a successful career as a TV Star on the long running comedy show “Hee Haw” and then continue to do stand up comedy and music in the years that followed.

Unfortunately, as a child treated with cruelty and then through a series of bad decisions, just when her career was taking off, she found herself completely lost and did not know where to go until she reached out to invite God to take over.

From the outside, Lulu Roman’s role on the long-running, highly popular TV variety show, Hee Haw, looked like the epitome of success. But hiding behind her success and humor was an extremely painful past as an orphan. This led to drug-addiction, low self-esteem, and weight battles, problems that did not go away once she hit it big. But once she found God, things changed.

Lulu’s struggle started the day she was born in a home for unwed mothers. At age four, her grandmother dropped her off at an orphanage, where she was raised. Despite the young age, Lulu remembers the moment in detail.

She has vivid memories of September 10, 1950. That was the day she was dropped in the orphans’ home.

To make matters worse, Lulu has a thyroid dysfunction resulting in a lifetime battle with her weight. Food was a comfort, so matters only got worse.

Lulu was called the “fat kid” and taunted with cruel songs, such as: “Fatty, fatty, 2 x 4, can’t get through the kitchen door.” She wished for a family who would take her home, but none ever did.

Life was hard. As she put it: “You stayed until you either were adopted, or your parents or your family came to retrieve you. Mine never did, and I never got adopted. They didn’t adopt fat kids.”

Lulu stayed at the orphanage until she was 18. The deep sense of rejection already poured into Lulu’s life only got worse. She longed for the “normal” life everyone else had.

“You sat in your closet and you cried — You sat in the window, and you watched the cars drive by. You thought, ‘If I could just have a Momma or a Daddy, or a brother or a sister, or a room of my own. ’She never had a bicycle. She never had a puppy. She never had any of those things that normal people had.”

She turned to her God-given talent for humor in order to cope.

She says she learned very early on that she could use a quick wit that the Lord had given her to have people laugh with her instead of at her.”

It was Lulu’s ability to make people laugh that caught the attention of country star and Hee Haw host, Buck Owens. He got her an audition and the Dallas girl was soon on her way to Hollywood.

They put her on a big jet plane, and they flew her to Hollywood, CA. She was taken to CBS television studios. The first person she saw was Carol Burnette. In shock, Carol said to her ‘Shut your mouth, child. You’re fixin ’to be one of us.’”

By this point in her life, Lulu had discovered drugs. In fact, she was high at the audition. And when the show became a hit, her addiction only worsened. In fact, it lost her her spot on the show for a year. During that time she also found out she was pregnant and alone.

Unmarried, she says she left for a year very bitter, very angry, thinking that if there was a God, He certainly didn’t love her because He dumped me.”

Sadly she kept using drugs during her pregnancy. She got past popping pills and smoking dope and had needle marks in her arms. No one told her not to do drugs while pregnant; as she puts it “I was the fat girl and nobody cared.”

As a result, Lulu’s son, Damon came into the world addicted to drugs. And it looked like there was no hope. They came in and said her son was going to die, and Lulu remembers trying to pray, but being so mad at God she wanted nothing to do with him. She says the only thing she knew how to say was “Yo, dude, if you’re real, I’ll make a deal with you. If you’ll let me have my baby, then I’ll straighten up and stop doing drugs and I won’t do anything except what you want me to.”

Her doctor said it would take a miracle to save her son. He said he could do all he could, but only God could do this one. And, God did just that.

She got a call from the hospital. Her son at 10 days old had his condition change drastically. The doctors unhooked him from the IVs, and placed him in the arms of his mother.

Lulu says she didn’t realize until four years later that God healed her son before she even asked Jesus to come into her heart. On the medical records, it said “Act of God” and there was no other medical explanation.

But now that Damon was healed, it was time to save Lulu. So God sent her a special messenger.

As she was leaving jail following a drug possession arrest, she ran into Diane. She knew Diane from the orphanage. But this was not the same Diane. Lulu says their meeting was a clear sense of divine intervention.

Diane wanted to tell her about Jesus. The first thing Lulu says that she wanted to say was “Don’t try to come at me with that. You grew up in the same place I did. Don’t even try it.” But Diane said “Louise, just listen to me. Let me tell you that Jesus is real. Let me tell you how He’s changed my life.”

So, Lulu listened. And as skeptical as she was, she couldn’t deny Diane was different. It was a pivotal moment for Lulu. She finally found the love she’d been seeking her entire life.

She says: “Whenever I got down on my knees and gave my life to the Lord, in that place, I mean, instantly He took those drugs away from me.”

The love of God changed Lulu so completely, she never returned to drugs. She never went through withdrawal. She was simply and miraculously healed.

The change in Lulu was so evident, the producers invited her back on Hee-Haw. And before accepting, she did something she hadn’t in the past — she prayed about it.

Lulu remained on the show for the rest of its run. And since then, she’s dedicated her life to sharing her testimony of how God’s amazing grace transformed her life. She’s recorded gospel albums and spends a lot of time providing outreach to orphans. She says “I know I can’t gather up a ton of these kids and adopt them and take care of them, but I can make them laugh for a little while. I can take them to great places and take their minds off of feeling sad. And that’s what I want to do.”

God does indeed do amazing things. And for all of us, like Lulu, we can get lost.

In that first reading from Isaiah, we have the image of God coming to his people, just like He came to Lulu. And notice in the story God coming to her was not based on her being perfect or overcoming her problems - she just had to invite Him in and get over some of her anger and pain.

Isaiah says “prepare the way of the Lord” and “make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God.” He goes on to say “every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley.” The context is the people, after 70 long years, are now going home. They are able to leave Babylon. But it won’t be an easy journey; indeed in the region were numerous hills and mountains and rugged terrain. Isaiah envisions God giving comfort to His people and helping to make the journey easier for them.

Of course God does not literally build roads for people to travel with ease. But God’s nature is such that He is always the one making the first move. He wants to give us

comfort. He sees our pain. He sees how we have fallen in sin. And so He wants to do something about it.

Advent gives us a chance to do a little soul searching and say to ourselves how is God able to come into my life. Much like you have to open a shade to let in the light, the same is true with a soul. God's love and grace are there, but they are never forced. What happens is obstacles get in the way. For Lulu, there were many: the pain of being bullied as a child, of being abandoned by family, of not knowing love, of a negative self image, of drugs that entered her life, and of anger that was a part of all of this. But only when she began to let go of the anger and clear the way if you will, God was then able to take over.

As we enter into this holy season, a great thing to do is to meditate on those words from Isaiah and say "OK, God, what needs to be cleared in my life?"

Perhaps you're a control freak, or want to micromanage the lives of others.

Maybe you've become angry like Lulu, or have let bitterness into your heart.

Maybe you've become indifferent to God, and never go to Mass, and have put prayer on the back burner.

Maybe you've become a coward and are afraid to speak about the faith, or stand up to injustice, because you are worried about what others will think or say about you.

Maybe you've become attached to worldly things like possessions and material things. Or perhaps hobbies rule your life and you neglect family and other responsibilities

Perhaps sloth has taken over and you expect others to do things for you.

Or maybe it's just apathy and a giving up on things, as we look at all that goes on in the world

Whatever it is, God can help with all of these things. When you pray, you can ask God to help you clear some of these things out of your life. And then ask Him what you need to do next. Maybe the answer will be go and make amends with your enemy. Or give to the poor. Or volunteer to be a catechist and preach the faith. Or to let go and realize you can't control others and things are outside of our power. When we sit with God, or spend time before the Blessed Sacrament, and incorporate prayer and silence into our lives, we can get that clarity and let God's light in.

With that too though, let's not forget Diane. As Lulu said, "God sent a messenger." In the Gospel, John the Baptist is that messenger. He is the forerunner, but he preaches a message of repentance. People come to him wanting to start anew and be baptized. So who is the messenger in your life? Perhaps God is sending you someone and we need to listen to them. Hopefully we have someone who will not fear giving it to us straight;

saying what we need to hear if we've made some bad decisions. We would be wise to heed these people, and also remember God sometimes wants us to be a messenger too.

Lastly, we join with God in the work. For Lulu, God entered her life. And while she considers it a miracle that she was able to overcome addiction, in reality, for most it takes work. God is there to help, but we have to take responsibility too. It's why we say in the Act of Contrition "avoid the near occasion of sin." We learn from our struggles; what was it that caused us to sin? What can we do to take steps to grow in grace? Perhaps it's asking for help or someone to keep us accountable; or seeking help; or taking more initiative to help out around the house, or volunteer, or do things for loved ones. Grace is amazing, but it always requires a response.

As we sing, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel, who ransoms captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear." Sin holds us captive, but Jesus sets us free. So clear the way and let us open our hearts and let Him in.