

## ‘Humble ballcocks and ghosts’



My name is Stephen, and I now live in Tonbridge in Kent with my wife Sylvia and our teenage children Alex and Lizzie. I was born in 1956 and brought up in Sutton, in Surrey. The second of three boys, I lived with my parents, great aunt and my mothers mother in a large Victorian house complete with high ceilings, an enormous attic (for my train set), a dark damp cellar full of spiders and rats; and ... three manifesting ghosts...

So how did I end up in Tonbridge and why, in 2000, did I find myself discussing the role of the humble ball-cock valve to hundreds in Rochester Cathedral. The latter is easy, just because you don't see it, doesn't mean it's not there; no valve, no water – just like Jesus. But back to the story, my spiritual background was minimal. My parents did have me baptised, completely out of the blue in my early teens. To compound all of this, I was told one day that one couldn't believe in ghosts and be a Christian. As our household ghosts were real, Christianity didn't have a chance until in my thirties when I was introduced to the Holy Ghost, but I'm jumping on too far.

In truth, as a child and as a young man I didn't see the need for a God, RE lessons at secondary school were about ethics and morality, church parades about flags and doing the right thing, Scout parades never sparked anything in me, and I enjoyed science fiction, I suppose I was a Trekkie. So what happened? The story as so often really begins with a pretty girl. My wife to be, Sylvia, had met Jesus in her teens on the side of a mountain in Snowdonia, when we met she wasn't attending a church and never spoke of her faith. She did however want, and got, a Church wedding and baptisms for our two children. One wedding and two baptism training courses under my belt, I was sincerely confident that Christianity was as irrelevant today as it had been all my life. My downfall however proved to be a friendship with a curate who was interested in model trains. We would meet, I would talk about trains, he would talk about his faith. One fateful night in the attic I mulled over in my mind what Mark had been saying about his faith, in my humble opinion it was still 'bunkum'. Alone, in the attic, God audibly spoke to me; not so much into my ears as into my whole body. Without any condemnation he said "I am sorry you don't believe, because I do". What was I to do? At that very moment all my prejudices were washed aside and I believed. A charismatic, evangelical child was born, a child who was hungry for both The Word & The Spirit.

Before I go on, I wish to say I believe God does speak to us audibly, I believe I have heard him since but that's a very different story for another time as it involves my dyslexia and prayer.

Like many new believers I wanted to know everything at once; I would travel miles to listen to different speakers, for two years I even travelled up to London after work to listen to RT Kendal at Westminster Chapel. As a counter balance I tried hard to find evidence that my faith was unreal, but I just kept meeting this man Jesus. At my Vicars recommendation I completed over three years the "Faith & Ministry" and then the "Developing Ministry's" courses. As much as anything they taught me to have an open mind and to accept that the Christian Church is full of strange traditions held together by our singular faith in Jesus. Christian training courses may claim much, they may even help you in your faith; but they do something else, you meet other believers with different backgrounds, traditions, incredible testimonies and often

alternative comprehension of scripture. You therefore develop tolerance to other Christian viewpoints which helps you grow in faith.

Luke 10: Verse. 20 – But you should not be happy because the spirits obey you, but because your names are written in heaven.

We might not understand everything in the bible – but be happy because through our faith in Jesus, our names are written in the book of life.

As I began my second year of study I applied for, and was accepted, to train as an Evangelist (one who brings good news); it's a great course because the Great Commission asks us all to share the good news of Jesus, and that's all I have to do, and I have a badge to go with it. What is truly impressive is just how difficult we as a church have made it. Two years of training later, I was accepted as a Lay Evangelist, and it was at my Commissioning at Rochester Cathedral that I ended up talking about ball-cock valves. We must remember that it is God who is in control of our lives (if we let him), it's just that we don't always see him – but if we look, we sometimes get the surprise of our life.

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