



HOW DID I FIND FAITH AND WHY DO I FEEL I WAS CALLED TO BE AN EVANGELIST?

I was born into a high Anglican tradition, progressing through Baptism, Sunday school, school, Confirmation, school choirs (Eastbourne College and Tiffin School) steeped in the choral tradition of King's College Cambridge. Soldiering exposed me to ecumenicalism, but until the beginning of the last decade, my faith was a personal matter between myself and God, in which prayer was used in times of crisis possibly and fellowship, as I have come to know and love, was unheard of!

Involvement in a life-changing sequence of traumatic events and experiences during the early-mid eighties devastated everything I had understood, believed in and defended in my life up to that point. The impact was phenomenal and very far-reaching, not just on wife, my family, and me but also on my connections and institutions internationally. Such was this devastation that my health, already disabled and deafened was broken spiritually and emotionally.

The pressures were enormous and relentless for over fourteen months. The strain on my wife and then very young family was immense. In fact both children developed different forms of epilepsy as a direct result. I reached the point where I could go on no more. In utter despair, I asked God to take back my life. Single-handedly I had fought my way into this mess and how had I achieved this? By trying to play God - trying to protect lives - only He could do that! I discovered this, the hard way! Overwhelmed by a total conviction of abject failure and this utter despair I sought the blessed relief of death. Thus it was that I gave my life back to God, asking Him to take over, to do with me what He willed. He knew best. I felt like the Sorcerer's Apprentice, very guilty and beyond further care as to what would follow, I was so completely drained and lost the will to live.

Shortly after this, in the early hours of the 21st of December 1985, I experienced a deeply affecting spiritual and physical experience, which will remain with me for the rest of my life. I knew that things were likely to get much worse, and they did! Nevertheless, the difference, the earth shattering difference for me now was that, because of this spiritual revelation, I was no longer alone - nor had I ever been, of course, if I had not been so busy trying to placate everybody and playing God to boot! I had forgotten the Lord, my Living God and was not then in possession of the magic guide, W.W.J.D. - "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?" Nevertheless, this was the turning point in my life - understanding and revelation of purpose were yet to come.

Not content to leave me alone, wallowing in my own misery, deafened and severely disabled as I now was, in early 1989 God led me literally howling and screeching into the Probation Service - how He achieved this is another story in itself. At the same time, He gently but determinedly introduced me to the Charismatic Evangelical wing of the Church of England, then in turn to both Billy Graham, Bishop David Pytches at St Andrews Chorley Wood, "New Wine" Conferences, their connections with the late John Wimber and the Vineyard Church respectively. My spiritual development was under way.

By 1994 I was actively assisting Jess Fuller, now a trained Evangelist, in determining whether he was being called to ministry as an Evangelist and would accompany him in his work in local pubs. I continued to support both Jess Fuller and Geoff Baker through their training. Also, by this time, some of my probation clients had begun to seek me out asking for spiritual guidance. It was at this point that I began to realize that all that I had been through, all that had happened to

myself, my family, connections and the changes in me that the Lord had brought about by then had been but preparation for this revelation of his purpose for me.

Naturally, as an old soldier, steeped in the principle of "Time spent in reconnaissance, seldom wasted" [John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough], I consulted widely and by now had learned to do so prayerfully as well. This process included my wife Dee, who was by this time beginning the process of spiritual development that culminated in becoming a Pastoral Assistant and who is now in training as an Evangelist towards offender / prison ministry. Her opinion I value greatly. My Vicar remained fully apprised of all this and has been fulsome in both his advise and support, as was my Chief Probation Officer at that time. Since that moment, I have been prayerfully and practically supported in developing my holistic casework / ministry by both my Church, St Matthews, High Brooms, Kent Probation Service and subsequent secondment to the Prison Service.

Throughout, in His time and in His way God, via His Son Jesus Christ, has unfailingly continued my spiritual development, protecting me with the Holy Spirit and refreshing me through outpourings of the Spirit, first passively witnessed at St Matthews and then personally experienced at "New Wine, 1995 and regularly ever since, whether it be through youth work ("Youth Apart") for the Church, or within Probation, by directing me to places of need, beginning whilst in the Kent Probation Field Team at Gravesend, to which I had been posted in 1993 and remained until 1997.

In the summer of 1997, however, I was seconded into the Prison Service and the Probation / Throughcare Department at H.M.P. Aldington, a Short-term Category "C" Resettlement and later a Home Detention Curfew Releasing Prison. From then until its sudden closure in the Spring of 1999, I was closely involved with the Chaplain, the Reverend Paul Foster, in pastoral work, resettlement of inmates back into their communities or new ones, liaising with the local churches in order to provide packages of Christian support, including accommodation, employment and fellowship. Additionally, we co-led a weekly video / discussion group, as well as Alpha and Emmaus courses. I also worked equally closely with the representatives from both the Methodist and Catholic Churches, the Salvation Army representative attached to the Prison, as well as with the visiting Imam and Rabbi. During my time at H.M.P. Aldington, I was able to witness God's hand at work and the Spirit moving in many wonderful ways. Over thirty came to Christ through Alpha alone!

From my arrival at H.M.P. Blantyre House in the early summer of 1997, I have been similarly involved with the Chaplaincy. Again my work at H.M.P. Blantyre House was supported by Kent Probation Service, the Prison Governors, the Prison Chaplains and both prayerfully and practically supported by my Vicar, as well as by St Matthews Fellowship and the members of my Small Group.

In June 2006, after seven wonderful and eventful years as the Probation representative at HMP Blantyre House, I was forced to accept that I had run my course. In September 2006 I was medically retired, but, of course, there is no such thing as retirement in God's ministry! I remain a Licensed Evangelist and an Assistant Lay-Chaplain at HMP Blantyre House. Now, however that I have ceased to be "Locked up" there myself on a daily working basis, I seem to see and minister to an increasing number of either present or former residents of the prison! I have also continued my role as the parish coordinator for the Holy Trinity Brompton offender / ex-offender releasing programme, which assists offenders / ex-offenders who have completed an Alpha course and wish to be released into our local area, by helping them to establish solid roots and providing spiritual guidance centered on St Matthews and its fellowship. Additionally, I have

retained my ministry to offenders / ex-offenders with addictive problems as an Associate Trustee of the Kenward Trust. Meanwhile, certain rash Evangelist colleagues and a few misguided clerics have been known to risk emptying their churches by asking me to “talk” – a fatal mistake!

In encapsulation, I firmly believe that the Lord exposed me to certain varied and testing life experiences, some of which were indeed horrific, which thereby equipped me and later empowered me with discernment, to tackle what He lovingly has led me to do within the neglected, but important area of ministry to offenders. To have charted such a course of experience did not happen by chance and was achieved as I have said “In spite of myself”! In my wildest dreams I could never have envisaged that I would have become part of the Probation Service, let alone acting as a conduit for God in the Country’s groundbreaking Long-Term Resettlement and “Lifer” Releasing Prison, HMP Blantyre House. Only the Lord, my God could have brushed aside all the difficulties and hurdles to achieve an aim that nearly twenty years ago was totally beyond my ken.

So, having experienced all this over the last incredible twenty five years of my life, including my own “Road to Damascus” in 1985, having witnessed God’s immeasurable Love, experienced the blessings of the “Comforter” and had prayer demonstrably answered, having been patiently and lovingly “dusted down” by Him via the Holy Spirit, God has guided me down the path He has so carefully prepared for me to tread. Today, I know in my heart that the Lord still wants me at the “Coal-face” - where it is hurting - as a witness to His all powerful and totally unconditional Love. The difference now seems to be that He is currently focusing me towards continuing my ministry, but within my further reduced physical capabilities, primarily to offenders returning to the community, with prison Chaplaincy work secondary. To that end, He has already drawn me to involvement with COMPAID, a trust that helps disabled adults and stroke victims acquire computer skills. This came out of the blue, at a time when I was finding it exceedingly difficult to accept reduced capabilities and medical retirement as a whole! COMPAID has helped me to adapt to my new circumstances. It also happens to be one of the community projects that men from HMP Blantyre House go to when undertake voluntary community work, part of that prison’s Restorative Justice regime. It affords opportunities to atone, or to say sorry through such appreciated voluntary work for past anti-social behaviour. Whilst the project continues to help me, I am also able to be there for these men, providing them with advice, counsel, fellowship and ministry as their Lay-Chaplain whilst they are on temporary Licence in the community.

The good Lord is always full of surprises! Most of all, however, God’s faithfulness has been visible throughout my life and during the last 25 years in particular. Although answers to prayer have sometimes not been apparent at the time, or answered in an anticipated way quite often, nonetheless and in spite of myself, God still dusts me down, continues to love me and provide for me, whilst continuing to develop me spiritually and place me where he wants me in His Kingdom ministry.

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