



FROM ARMED SOLDIER TO SOLDIER OF THE CROSS

I have been most blessed in life, although I did not realise this much of the time. I have been constantly surrounded by Christian relations: A Great Grandmother, both sets of Grandparents, Dad and Mum, later a Brother, my dear wife Judy, and her Dad and Mum, just to name a few. I am truly thankful for them all.

A preacher's kid.



I always believed in a Superior Being and new that our family was different than others, but it was not until I started school that I found out the reason why. From a very young age I was subjected to “mickey taking”¹ from my classmates because my Dad was a minister. To combat this, I went out of my way to shatter the image that the ministers’ sons are “goody-goody.” This continued into high school, and to be honest I was a total nightmare—a right “Jack the Lad”!² Wherever there was trouble in school, I was not far away from it. This episode of my life is a reminder to pray for the children of Christian Ministers. They do take a lot of flak.

Our Sundays consisted of church in the morning, Sunday school in the afternoon, followed by the evening service. Then we had Young People’s Fellowship on a Tuesday evening. This routine continued until I was 16. In that time, my head became full of Bible knowledge, but I had no heart knowledge of the Lord.

¹ A shortened form of the slang “Taking the Michael.” Taking the mickey is to make fun of, to tease, or, more seriously, to mock.

² “Jack the Lad” means a bad boy.



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In September 1978, just after my sixteenth birthday I entered the British army, and after fifteen months of training I joined my regiment in Osnabrück, formerly West Germany. After a period of inductions, I was accepted as one of the boys. This meant I was back to my old tricks again, except this time with an extra ingredient—alcohol. Life was great, so I thought. I was like the prodigal son living life to excess (Luke15:11-32).

In 1981 my regiment was sent on active service to Northern Ireland. The tour of duty began against the backdrop of the Irish Republican hunger strike which was coming to a head. This was a massive wakeup call for me. During my time there I saw sin at its worst, and to my shame I was involved in it. This included people getting hurt. I had sunk to the bottom of the pit.

On Christmas Day 1981 my Grandfather was called home to heaven. Before he died my mother made a recording of him singing hymns and talking of heaven so that I could hear his voice when I got home on Christmas leave, in the event of his passing away by the time I arrived. On the tape he kept referring to me being in heaven with him. This troubled me greatly as the sins I had committed in Ireland where weighing heavily on me.

The next year, my father was called to another church, and the family moved from Pembrokeshire in South Wales to Holywell in North Wales. On my next leave, I was introduced there to an ex-Royal Marine who attended the church. His name was Andy Peterson. He invited me to his home on many occasions over the next eighteen months. In Andy I found a kindred spirit. We shared together army tactics. I was able to open myself up to him and tell him about the sins I had committed in Ireland for they still troubled me. Through Andy's witness and example, and the fact that he had been unsaved throughout his service during the war, I saw that there might be



hope of my sins being forgiven. It was with great sadness, then, that in January 1984 I heard that Andy had left us for heaven.

Back in civvy street.

I left the army in July 1987, returned home and settling in quite easily. I went back to attending church regularly since I was living in my parents' home, but only out of politeness. Dad had been diagnosed with M.S.³ and was starting to struggle. I was amazed by how positive he was and by the strength of my mother. Their faith still amazes me. As my Dad told me on many occasions, "God does not make mistakes. Everything happens for a reason."

Judy and I were married on the 18 May 1991. We set up home in Greenfield, attending the same church where my father had been the minister until his M.S. left him disabled. By January 1995 Judy was expecting Hannah. During her 20-week scan I remembered what Dad had told me years before: that one day I would have to stand before God and answer as to how I had brought up my children. This worried me, but I quickly dismissed the thought. However, the night Hannah was born, it returned again. When, then, I arrived home from the hospital in the early hours of the morning, I picked up my Bible and randomly opened it. It fell open on Proverbs chapter one. Verse eight was the first I read: "My Son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother" (KJV). This shook me to my core. I decided there and then to read a chapter every day. Having completed Proverbs, I started reading the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible.

In August 1996, Tudor Lewis, a member of our church, passed away. I was fond of Tudor, so the week of the funeral I phoned Eirian to send her my sympathies. I had typically seen Eirian and her sister-in-

³ "M.S." is Multiple Sclerosis.



law Dorothy Lewis as people to keep at arm's length, for they would challenge me about my spiritual state. I found it embarrassing. However, after spending a long time on the phone with Eirian, I realised that her marriage had been a three-way partnership between the Lord on the one hand and Tudor and Eirian on the other.

After the funeral and during the refreshments Eirian called me over. She thanked me for my call, and then said something to me which knocked me for six;⁴ that, "she would quite happily give up Tudor, her husband, for the sake of one soul". I was lost for words and was amazed at this dear lady's faith. I excused myself, for my eyes were welling up.

By 2002 I had completed reading the whole Bible, but the book of Revelation scared me immensely. It reminded me of what my father had said to me while I was still in the army: "Andy, lad, you are walking over the flames of hell on rotting cloth." So, I started to pray as well as to read the Bible.

The year 2006 was not a good year. We had a car accident which left me in plaster and in constant pain. Surgery was required, but the biggest pain of all was that my prayers were not being answered. I was beginning to think that I was beyond redemption. I was close to committing the cardinal sin of writing off my soul and putting my Bible away. That same year was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Republican hunger strike. Memories of my time in Northern Ireland came flooding back. I was reading about the hunger strike on the internet and saw a link to Billy Wright. He was someone I had met on numerous occasions. He was one of the Loyalist leaders of the *Ulster*

⁴ "Knocked for six" is a cricket term bespeaking the highest scoring action. It is equivalent to hitting a home run or knocking the ball out of the park.



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volunteer Force (UVF)—a terrorist group which had been a constant thorn in our side. I read the link, and was astounded that while in prison, Billy had read some Christian literature and had been saved. Billy was assassinated while in the Maze prison in 1997 by a Catholic terrorist group the *Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)*.

“Thank you, Lord Jesus!”

My spirits were now lifted. I decided to read the Bible slower, and to pray harder. By the middle of 2011 certain things had changed in my life. Church was now interesting, and I had begun using on a regular basis what we call telegraph prayers (quick prayers shot up to God). As, however, I approached the end of the New Testament for the second time, I dreaded reading again the book of Revelation. Yet, this time, it had a great calming effect on me.

I have no specific date for my conversion to God but recall the significance of the period between June and December 2011. As that half-year opened, I was still not sure if I belonged to the Lord and lacked assurance of my faith in Christ. So, I asked the Lord for a sign. When it came, it was a most terrifying experience. Early in December 2011, I was walking to work due to snowy weather. As I crossed the road into the business park, a car shot around the corner and lost control. It was sliding straight towards me. I tried to run but was slipping all over the place. I felt the whole length of the car brush the back of my legs. The Lord, however, used my knee-jerk response to bring me to assurance of faith in Christ. Instead of reacting, “Boy, that was close!” I blurted out, “Thank you, Lord Jesus.” The relief from the near escape, but, more than that, from my uncertainty, was immense. My prayers had been answered. I knew my sins had been forgiven through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus unto the death of the cross.



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Straightaway I had an urge to read more. Again, my prayers were answered. One of the first presents I opened on Christmas Day 2011 was *Spurgeon's Morning and Evening* from my parents. I wanted to read yet more. On my Birthday in 2012 Judy bought me a Kindle. I uploaded the Bible, the whole *Works of Mathew Henry, Pilgrim's Progress* and *Foxe's book of Martyrs*, all for free. I decided that, for my quiet time every morning, instead of reading a chapter each day I would read shorter passages then read the explanation from Mathew Henry's commentary. I still follow this format.

In April 2013 Eirian was called home. During her funeral, Pastor mentioned that Eirian had told him that she would give up her husband for the conversion of one soul. This hit me hard as that was what she had said to me those years previously. I had been saved nearly eighteen months by that point, but still had not told anybody. As a secret disciple this affected me greatly. I realized I was missing out on so much.

On 22 January 2014 we received the sad news that Pam Parry had suddenly passed away. I enjoyed our chats when driving her home from Sunday School. I admired how her family coped with the demands of looking after Pam, for she had inherited the multiple dystrophy from her mother's side of the family. Her passing at a young age brought back to me how fragile life is, and that we should treat every day as our last.

At that time, our pastor had recently announced about those desiring baptism. My daughter Ellie beat me to it and was among the candidates for baptism. So, the following Tuesday, 6 February 2014, I sent the pastor an e-mail also requesting to be baptised.

Why had I been a secret disciple for so long? This is a question I had been asking myself. I can think of only three reasons: First, cowardice; second, doubt; or fear of being compared to my father



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and brother, both of whom have doctorates in theology. They have forgotten more than I will ever know.

In closing, I thank Judy for all her prayers and the love she has shown me over our twenty-nine years of our married life. I praise God for way my mother and late father raised me, and for their prayers and guidance, as also that of my Sunday



school teachers and pastors. Many brothers and sisters in the Lord have prayed for me over the decades and have given me Christian Literature. For this I am most grateful, too.

Above all, I thank Jesus. He is fuller of grace than I am of sin. Through his shed blood and atoning death my sins are forgiven. My name is written in the Lambs Book of Life!

May 23, 2020

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