



ON BELIEVING:  
WHAT IS THE FAITH THROUGH WHICH WE  
ENCOUNTER GOD?

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No one enters life in a right relationship to God, not even a Welshman of Presbyterian stock! For all the spiritual privileges I inherited at birth, I was, from the outset, out of step with my Maker (Psalm 51:5). While not ends in themselves, such privileges set me apart from many of my peers, even in the rural Wales of my youth. Among them, our family and church family were especially important. These two divine institutions combined to ensure the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, powerfully, urgently, and unmistakably calling me to get right with God.

***Born a Pembrokeshire boy.***

My life began in 1966 in Pembrokeshire, in the southwest corner of Wales. I was the third of four children born to Peter and Margaret Trumper.

My father was an unlikely Presbyterian minister. Educated in an English public school, his parents moved to Cardiff during World War II. There he became a Dean Scholar in the choir at Llandaff Cathedral. Later, he opted for a staunch atheism during his time at Cardiff Castle of Music and Drama, only to be suddenly converted to Christ in 1953. Thereafter, he continued into stage and screen acting, that is to say until God called him into the Christian ministry a few years later.

My mother, on the other hand, was a nurse and midwife by training. Her father, a Cardiff electrician, had tried to “beat Christianity out of her” during her teenage years. Yet, by his late forties, he, too, had become a Christian, serving in his later years as a founder-Elder of

*Bethany*, the church my father pioneered in Clarbeston Road, near Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire.

Being the son of a minister can be somewhat embarrassing and inconvenient at times. As Dad used to say, the children of Christian homes often suffer for the faith of their parents. Sensitive to this, he and Mum sought to provide us with as normal an upbringing as possible. Outside of school, we often spent Saturday mornings walking Lucy our Pembrokeshire Corgi along the beautiful beaches of the county. On wet Saturdays, we would go swimming at the local pool. As the years unfolded, Andy, Ceri, Karl, and I chose variously to join the Cubs, Brownies, Scouts, and Army Cadets. Additionally, Karl and I spent many Saturdays playing football and cricket for Narberth at under 13 and under 15 levels.

As fully integrated as we were into the community, two things stood out about our upbringing. First, we would read a passage from the Bible and pray as a family each morning and evening. In the evenings this took longer because Dad would run a competition throughout each school term. Every evening he would read the Scriptures and then oversee two rounds of questions on the passage read. Two points were awarded for correct answers, one for a half-correct answer, and, of course, none for wrong answers. It was a fun way to learn the Holy Scriptures. Often we would linger after prayers in order to test Dad’s knowledge of the Bible. Picking out a verse at random, we challenged him to tell us from whence it came. Regularly frustrated by how difficult it was to catch him out, we learned day-by-day how important he considered the knowledge of the Scriptures to be.

Then there were Sundays. In the main, we spent each Lord’s Day listening to Dad preach. His evangelistic sermons were particularly memorable, probably because they had the most personal relevance. Always graphic and passionate, they were often based on the narrative portions of the Gospels. The renowned preacher Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a native of the neighbouring county of Cardiganshire,

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<sup>1</sup> This is an edited version of the testimony first published in *God Found Me* (Fearn, Ross-Shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2000).

once wryly said of him: “There’s a man by the name of Trump . . . Trump . . . Trumpet . . . and by all accounts, he’s busy blowing it!” It is true. My father was a trumpeter by calling and by conviction. Indeed, never have I heard more powerful evangelistic preaching than that on which I was reared. In many ways, my own delight in, and method of, evangelistic preaching has been based on the memories of the sermons on which I was raised. The message he preached was ably accommodated to our young capacities in the afternoon Sunday School. On alternate Sunday mornings, we would miss the morning service in Clarboston Road in order to support a Sunday School led by Harry Adams and Pat Davies in the nearby village of Llawhaden.

It would be dishonest to say that we never desired to be elsewhere. In fact, I often dreaded Mondays because my school friends would endlessly discuss all the “telly” they had seen the day before. Yet, missing “telly” was not so much a problem to me as to them. I dearly loved the people at church and they loved us, too. Indeed, like others before me, I longed to get to the age of 13 so that I could join the weekly Young People’s Fellowship (YPF) on Tuesday evenings. They were happy times. The first half of YPF was spent chatting, weightlifting, playing football (soccer!), table tennis (ping pong!), and rounders, and the second half in Bible study or the discussion of some relevant topic. The leaders— Norman and Jacqui, John and Sian, Rowland and Beat, Betty Stowell and John and Mair Murray—were such mainstays in our young lives. Christianity seemed to flow so naturally from them. But it was not natural, a point they went to great lengths to underline!

### ***Outwardly decent, inwardly decadent.***

Although this sort of upbringing might be widely dismissed today as brainwashing, it is important to note that our parents, our teachers, and their lessons taught us that they could effect nothing in us, for salvation is all of God. Brainwashing, then, by the very content of the teaching would have accomplished nothing, for we were taught that

only God could procure for us a right relationship with him. It was not for us, then, to rely on our parents, our Sunday School teachers, or our youth leaders, but to turn to God, seeking him for ourselves.

Under such teaching, I became aware of a deep-seated contradiction within. I gleaned more knowledge about God than my peers at school and my elders in the neighbourhood, and yet, notwithstanding it all, I had no personal knowledge of God. I knew from my parents and by experience that I was alienated from God and that no matter how Christian they were or how healthy my church life was, neither could reconcile me to God. Only Christ could do that. Indeed, without trust in his reconciling work, my religious upbringing would constitute but a pew-filling “Churchianity”. Thus, it was clear to me from the outset that a relationship with God is neither a natural right nor a privilege of upbringing. It is a gift of God’s grace in Christ, which is received with the empty hands of faith.

I bought into this teaching not because I was brainwashed, but because it rang true in my head and my heart. I sensed that there was indeed something obstructing me from a relationship and fellowship with my Maker. Sin, meaning “any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God”<sup>2</sup>, is the best explanation for this. It not only breaches God’s law but is an offence to his holy character. Judicially and ethically it separates us from God, so separating us in fact that the gulf is too yawning for any of us to cross.

I came to accept, then, that man’s sinful condition was inevitably mine. However sheltered I had been from the sin surrounding me, nobody could protect me from the sin that lay within me. I was a sinner if for no other reason than that I had failed to love God as he deserves, and with all my heart, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). An inordinate self-love prevented me. Thus, instead of fulfilling the will of God my Creator, I was prepared to revel in sins of pride, lying, deceit, anger, and hypocrisy. When I should have been convicted by

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<sup>2</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, Answer 14 to the question, “What is Sin?”.

them, I remained for the time being quite unperturbed by them. I knew my sin as a theological fact but not as an affront against God. To quote the *Confessions* of the church father, Augustine (354–430), “my pride-swollen face had closed up my eyes”.

At the time, this was most convenient, for I firmly suspected that if God gifted me Christ he would have me preaching him to others before too long! As much as I loved and esteemed my father, I understood that in society’s increasing godlessness, he was a social oddball, and had a foreboding that if I became a Christian it would mean becoming one, too! To evade this plight in life, I felt obliged to evade becoming a Christian. God would have to remain content with my presence in the church, but nothing more.

### ***The long path to pardon.***

At the age of 8, this cavalier approach to God was severely tested when some young people from Cheltenham and Gloucester came to use the Sunday School hall for a Summer holiday. It soon became obvious that one of the young people was intensely keen to evangelise our youth group. While his zeal was most commendable, some maturing would have held him back from coercing us to make decisions for Christ. Eventually, Lincoln came around to Karl and me. It was our turn to be cornered. After reasoning with us on one occasion for what felt like several hours, Lincoln took us to a secluded spot so that we could ask the Lord into our hearts. Too young to resist, we dutifully complied. As we did so, the thought struck me that perhaps a belief in biblical doctrine is all that is meant by trusting in Christ, for what else could faith entail? We, therefore, followed Lincoln’s direction in praying for forgiveness but did so no more understanding the gravity of prayer for salvation than when we trotted out our prayers in family worship. The exercise was all in my head. My heart was unchanged toward God and the sin from which I asked for forgiveness.

Upon returning home, Lincoln, confident of my true conversion, kindly wrote to me to nurture me in my new Christian life. Making the schoolboy error of leaving his letter in my trouser pockets when they went to the wash, my Mum found the letter and asked me about it. I remember the moment, unable to say to this day why exactly I did not come clean there and then about the spuriousness of my conversion. I suspect that I wanted it to be true, and would not have wanted to hurt Lincoln by going back on the prayer for forgiveness. Clearer to me is the way God used my response to keep before me over the next seven years the need for faith. Over that time, I bore the label “Christian” most uncomfortably, in what was to me an impossible, unpleasurable, and often inconvenient profession of faith in Christ.

I don’t think I was looking to deceive, but was genuinely perplexed as to what the Bible means by the verb “to believe”. If my belief in all the teachings of Holy Scripture cannot put me in touch with God, then what is the faith referred to in such famous gospel texts as John 3:16?<sup>3</sup> Unable to understand and too shy to ask, such texts, deemed to be crystal clear, remained to me as clear as mud. Occasionally I would ponder them but without grasping them. However, some young and unexpected deaths pressed home to me the importance of resolving the nature of the faith that saves.

### ***Chased on by death’s shadow.***

First, there was the death of Scott Kelly, a school friend. Together we spent his last Saturday playing on “The Moor” in our hometown of Narberth. Little did we know that that would be our last time playing together. Scott died of Meningitis early the next week. We were 10 years old at the time.

Conscious that detailed talk of death was a strong societal taboo and would be a giveaway of my private world, I took over the months to

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<sup>3</sup> “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (ESV).

come to cycling alone to the crematorium on the outskirts of the town. The first time, I gazed at the bunch of wild primroses that had so recently lain on Scott's coffin, pondering where he was now. Wherever, my quest to find out what faith in Christ means now took on so much more importance, for I might not have decades to work it out. So, I returned and returned, often walking alone in the gardens of the crematorium, reading the floral messages and watching the bereaved from a distance as they said farewell to their loved ones. I pondered how my ending would turn out, and what then?

Around the same time, Paul Rees, a member of our church's youth group, became a Christian. That piqued my interest. I could not wait to see him at church. Would he look different? Speak differently? Or act differently? Outwardly he seemed to be the same. Everything appeared as it was. Yet, later, when he left Wales for Scotland to train as a gillie (an attendant on fishing expeditions), his letters to the youth leaders bespoke a saving faith of which I knew nothing. So, when Paul drowned in the River Dee near Aberdeen in 1978, I pondered deeply whether, in the event of my death, my relatives would be so confident of my eternal destiny as Paul's were of his. Could it be said of me, as his uncle Norman had written next to Paul's name in the Sunday School register, that "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8)? I doubted it.

### ***Off-loading Churchianity en route.***

By that time, I had left Narberth Primary School and had begun attending grammar school in Whitland, sixteen miles from the church and across the border into Carmarthenshire. With the move, there developed possibilities for living a double life. Although I remained morally upright, there was no positive difference detectable between me and my non-Christian friends. Daily I got through life without a conscious sense of God's presence, for I was yet to cross over from a nominal Christian faith to a saving faith in Christ. I could hide that fact from my family and church family (so I thought), but there ate away

at me the thought that I could not hide from myself the falsity of my profession of faith in Christ nor, more importantly, from the all-seeing God who "knows those who are His" (2 Timothy 2:19).

As time passed, the burden of my profession of faith became unbearable. I simply did not have the power of Christ in me to grow as a Christian. After church, one Sunday morning, my father, concerned about my behaviour, took me to my bedroom. Standing opposite me, looking straight at me, he quietly and soberly explained that he had always rejoiced in God that 25% of his children knew and loved the Lord. Yet, he had to confess, that he saw no evidence of this in my life. With that, he got right down to the essence of the matter: "Tim, do you love the Lord?"

Now that is a great question to ask a nominal Christian, for it shreds the veneer of "Churchianity" behind which nominal Christians hide. Had Dad asked me a more generic question, I could have fudged the issue. Had he assumed I loved the Lord, and pressed me on to greater efforts toward holiness, he would have pushed me into moralism. Instead, I saw in the question a heaven-sent opportunity to be free of my false profession of faith. Indeed, over the prior months I had come to the conviction that I could not seek God sincerely without shedding the profession of faith, for God "delights in truth in the inward being" (Psalm 51:6). And so, grabbing the opportunity to be free of the counterfeit, I plucked up the courage to tell Dad that did not love the Lord. What was evidently a deeply disheartening moment for him, was for me a weight relinquished. I now determined from that moment on to seek God with all my heart and not to give up until I knew that he had heard me (Hebrews 11:6).

Over, then, the next months of 1981, my trite formulaic prayers gave way to earnest conversations with God. In them, I pleaded with him to make me one of his own. I began confessing to him that my 15-year-old life was indefensible in the light of his justice and holiness. I concurred with the prophet Jeremiah's declaration that the human heart is beyond a cure (Jeremiah 17:9) and came to see as never

before what Jesus meant when he talked about the uncleanness that comes from the heart (Mark 7:20-23). The fact that he was thinking of the Pharisees at the time put paid to any thoughts that my “innocence” and church attendance could secure anything from God, let alone his greatest gift of salvation, for the Pharisees spent even more time in “church” than I did!

### ***Reconciled at last.***

As I sought God, he graciously began revealing to me something of what it means to believe. I had for long enough possessed the *knowledge* that informs true saving faith, but now God’s Spirit was taking hold of that knowledge to instill in me a *conviction* of my sin. Not only did I begin confessing individual sins, I began to see and to acknowledge before God that sin lay at the core of my being. Indeed, it disabled me from either wanting or enacting the right. I became disinterested in how I fared with others, focusing on how I stood in relation to God’s law and the perfection of his character. Since I was now convinced of being a lawbreaker and an offence to God, it meant nothing to me that my life was deemed impeccable by my friends at school. All that mattered was that God, who knew me perfectly, inside and out, holding the exclusive prerogative to forgive me or not, would show me mercy. This concern got me pleading with God, and thus I was divinely brought to the climactic element of saving faith: *trust in Christ*.

It was the summer of 1981. I went for the first time to a Christian youth camp. It was held in Colwyn Bay, North Wales, under the auspices of the Evangelical Movement of Wales (EMW). Although a year too young for it, I was admitted. On the camp I met many young people who evidently knew and loved the Lord and who spoke sincerely to me of their faith in Christ. Travelling home with my parents at the end of the week and obviously enthused by the camp, my mother asked if I wanted to follow a number of the young people from the camp on to the EMW conference at Aberystwyth the

following week. We agreed to go on the Monday and to see if there was space on the youth camp there, too. Again, there was. Even then I sensed that God was orchestrating events.

Typical of God, there was one space left in the conference’s youth accommodation. Throughout the week, my conviction of personal sin increased. The more it did so, the more I longed for hope in Christ. After all, had not God sent his Son into the world to bridge the yawning chasm between us? Christ’s divinity bespoke his ability to save sinners like me, his humanity his responsibility within God’s plan to bear my sins unto the death of the cross. Furthermore, had not God raised his Son from the dead to assure us that sin’s full penalty of death had been fully paid on the cross and accepted in heaven? Since, then, all was accomplished for our salvation through Christ what was there left for me “to do” but to trust in Christ and his finished work (John 19: 30)?

To this end, I spent much of the week in prayer. Thus, when, on the Thursday night of the conference, Rev. Luther Rees announced John 3:16 as his sermon text, I spent the duration of the sermon calling on God. At the end of it, Mr. Rees invited to the front for prayer any interested in coming to Christ. Mortified by the thought of going forward, it was very tempting to ignore the offer. After all, I had caught a glimpse of my mother at the service prior to its commencement! “But,” I thought, “if salvation is God’s greatest gift, he may well be testing me to see how much I desire to be a Christian.” So, serving that night as a steward, I went forward, pretending to check the amplification equipment, hoping to slip through into the vestry without being seen. There I sat with an older lady and a young man from Swansea, each of whom was lovingly spoken to and prayed for by Rev. Rees.

An encounter with God is, though, an intensely personal affair. So, yet needing to get alone with God, I quickly left the church to wander prayerfully through the dark streets of Aberystwyth. God had now cornered me. All “ifs” and “buts” of self-excuse were gone, yet I could

not coerce God to forgive my sin or to accept me as his own. Right then I felt as if I was back in the inspection chamber into which I had fallen as a boy, with only the light above offering any hope, but obliged to await my rescue. "I cannot demand that God answer me, let alone answer me now," I reasoned within, "so what do I do in the meantime? I will try and keep God's commandments." (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21). No sooner did the thought flit across my mind than another followed: "But that is the point, I cannot keep them! I need to know that Christ has kept God's law for me, at every point at which I have broken it, and has died for my every breakage of it."

Returning to the youth accommodation at Penweddyg School, I avoided friends who were hanging out, heading straight to bed. My purpose was not to sleep, but to continue wrestling earnestly with God, for God's mercy had come to mean everything to me. I was driven on by the realization dawning on me earlier in the week that God saves those who call on him. All along, I had passively understood the words of the prophet Joel (Acts 2:21) to be but a proposition, but now I actively appropriated what I had come to understand was God's promise to those who seek him.

That said, no answer came by the morning. With the loss of sleep, I was beginning to flag in my pursuit of God. Yet, I was sustained by the thought that if God is who he says he is, then he will keep his promise. Moreover, I recalled a truth first learned in Sunday School, namely that God is omnipresent. "If God is present everywhere, he must be with me even in this sleeping bag!" Thus, with a fresh wave of energy, I continued to call on God, aided by the apostle Paul's assurance to the Athenians that God is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27).

With that in mind, I got up and went to the morning prayer meeting. There praise was offered to God for the three converted the night before. This irked me somewhat, for I was yet desperate to be able to say, in the words of the hymnist Fanny Crosby (1820–1915), that

"Jesus is mine".<sup>4</sup> As things stood, I was at the end of myself, seeing no way that life could go on without him. Just then, as the prayer meeting drew to an end, my deep depression suddenly and completely lifted. In flooded God's peace into my soul. Joy too, for God had faithfully kept his promise to save me (1 John 1:9)! For the first time I could say that I was assured that my sins were forgiven. My climb into the bright morning sunshine from the dimness of the basement prayer meeting seemed so akin to the transition which, by divine grace, I had just undergone from the kingdom of darkness into God's most marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). As I entered the sunlight the cheerful thought ran through my mind: "So this is real Christianity!"

### ***Life as God's child.***

That was 14 August 1981. In all this time, God has never let me down nor let me go. He employs my daily experiences for growth in what John Calvin describes as true and sound wisdom: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. God continues to teach me about his willingness to forgive, to heal, to sanctify, and to preserve. I have hope that by the time we meet hereafter, I shall be like him in holiness and be able to see him as he is (Psalm 17:15; 1 John 3:2). But before that great day, there is no end of opportunities to love God and to serve his purposes in and through his church.

To my shame, the desire to put God first came slowly. At the outset, I reveled in the forgiveness procured for me by Christ on the cross, but struggled to adapt to his Lordship over my life. Consequently, being restless, miserable and unable to see why, I began questioning the reality of Christianity; that is to say, until I saw God's power at work very close at hand and in a manner so counter-intuitive to the way the world views power.

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<sup>4</sup> The phrase comes from the first verse of Crosby's hymn, "Blessed Assurance": "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his Spirit, washed in his blood."

I refer to my father's diagnosis of multiple sclerosis in September 1983. This proved to be a truly momentous development in the life of our family. Thereafter, Dad continued to daily climb the stairs to awaken me for school. As he did so, I could not help but note that his diagnosis made no impact on his cheerful demeanor, either within or without the home. This impressed me greatly, and left me pondering how he could be so cheerful each morning, while I, a fit and healthy teenager, making the same profession of faith, was miserable and lethargic. Then, one day, as Dad left the bedroom, God enlightened me as to the difference: "That's it! There is no true happiness without true holiness! If I want to be happy and know the sustained joy and peace of which the gospel speaks, I must walk with God."

As obvious now as was this "aha moment", it came to me with such force that it changed entirely my approach to life. Instead of passively waiting for holiness to descend upon me (theologians call this Quietism), I opted to actively pursue it. I did so, for it now dawned on me that when I received Christ as my Saviour I also received him as my Lord. It follows that he must come first in every area of my life. To the carnal eye, the Lordship of Christ seems confining, and yet it is the embracing of Christ as Lord of our lives which opens our souls to the sweetest joys and the most abundant peace a Christian can know.

### ***A "social oddball" for Christ.***

In 1985 I left home for the University College of Swansea, set on following God wherever he would lead. As earlier suspected, I was *en route* to becoming a 'social oddball' like my father! What eventually turned me towards the ordained ministry was the sheer contrast between my study of politics and the beauty and power of biblical truth expounded at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Swansea. Whereas the former is important for the here and now, the latter is vital for now and for eternity. The university lectures left me disillusioned by the state of the world, but the weekly sermons and fellowship convinced

me that God has not left man destitute. He has given us "the truth": His Son Jesus (John 14:6). And so, by the final year of my politics degree I felt more and more compelled to make him known.

There followed many years of theological training in Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland, at the Free Church of Scotland College (now Edinburgh Theological Seminary) and the Divinity School of Edinburgh University, with a year spent during the doctoral studies at the Karl-Eberhard Universität, Tübingen, Germany.

Just before heading to Scotland in 1989, in a precious confirmation of my call to ordained ministry, the Lord kindly brought Jenny Mitchell to faith in Christ. The sermon was the first evangelistic message I preached. All these years later, Jenny continues to go on with the Lord. I mention this, for the evidence of saving grace in Jenny's life has been to me a wonderful tonic to keep me pressing on throughout the highs and lows of ministry.

Since then, it has been a joy to encounter God's people throughout the United Kingdom, and internationally since 1993. The exposition of the Word grants me a deep sense of fulfillment, the administration of the Lord's Supper an awareness of the level playing field on which grace has placed God's people, and the administration of baptism the joy of seeing infants and new believers coming into the covenant community of God's church. Especially thrilling, has been the baptism of those coming to Christ from the nominal Christianity I yet remember so well, and from other world faiths and none (Muslim, Hindu, Atheist).

It never ceases to amaze me that the Lord works even through my weakness. He promises his servants that his Word will accomplish what he divinely intends (Isaiah 55:11). My remaining sin, I confess, is the greatest hindrance to my preaching, and yet I marvel at how it helps me to commend the Saviour. In truth, I need just what my people need. There is, then, nothing quite like proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. All authority has been given unto him to bring about

the plan of the triune God., but what a thrill it is, in my time and place, to sit in the front row and to observe a little of what God is doing.

Looking forward, I pray to finish strongly. Converted slave trader John Newton (1725–1807) speaks for me as for so many others: “I am not what I should be, I am not what I could be, I am not what I shall be hereafter, but I am not what I once was; and, what I am, I am by the grace of God.” That grace took away my “Churchianity” and gave me Christ; it has filled me with the purpose and desire to glorify God and to enjoy him forever; and it encapsulates the immeasurable riches of God’s kindness to be replayed throughout the coming ages of eternity (Ephesians 2:7).

May you, too, know such kindnesses. Cautions Joseph Hart (1712–68):

Let not conscience make you linger,  
Nor of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness he requireth,  
Is to feel your need of him.  
This he gives you;  
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.

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