

Testimony

When asked how I became a Christian, I often like to say that I came to faith through the cult, the Jehovah's Witnesses.

One day, when my siblings and I were teenagers, some people came to our home in Malaysia and offered to have weekly Bible readings with us. Not being particularly religious, my father agreed, thinking a little religion would be good for his children so long as they did not take it too seriously.

And so, over two years, as you can imagine, we went from total ignorance to a growing awareness about a holy God on the one hand and sinful man on the other. And in between there was an irreconcilable gap that could not be bridge except for Jesus. Faced with this reality, I knew I was required to do something about it. The choice was very simple and clear. I could either bow and accept the facts as they were presented to me or I could reject it. Those were the only two distinct options. There was no middle way, no third choice.

After those two years of bible study, I was invited to an evangelistic service at a Methodist church. It was a moving service with many witnesses testifying about the work of God in their lives and when there was an altar call at the end, feeling a deep conviction about the holiness of God versus the sin in my own life, I went forward to accept Christ. Unfortunately, I was not followed up on and I soon passed the whole thing off as an emotional experience.

Six months later, I was a brand new student, alone and wandering the streets of London. By God's grace, British Christian students from the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship were out on the streets of the city welcoming people like me. Through them, I was introduced to All Souls Church, Langham Place. In attending All Souls, I came to realise that I had already become a Christian; I had made that commitment to accept Christ's Lordship, now, I just needed to grow as a believer and a disciple.

The reason I tell of this development in some detail is to highlight a number of points.

Firstly, and you already know this, there are plenty of people out in the world who know nothing about the God of the Bible. They may have some vague notion but they really do not know the true God as revealed by Jesus and as spoken of in the scriptures. My family, like so many people were ignorant.

Secondly, to paraphrase Paul's argument in Rom 10, people, especially ignorant people, cannot call on the name of the Lord unless someone tells them about Him. To their credit, the Jehovah's Witnesses brought the word to us so that we could learn about the God of the bible even though the initial bible they put in our hands was defective. I cannot be grateful enough for their diligence because through their efforts, two of my three siblings and I eventually came to our own saving faith in Christ. Through misguided organizations like the JWs, though the evil one may intend ill to mislead many from Christ, yet God is able to use even these means to bring his own to himself.

Those first years as a young Christian, I remember, were fantastic years of hunger, amazement and growth. At All Souls, through a sermon or a book, the word was made clear and you understood. Time and time again, those moments of enlightenment kept coming, each one like a tiny Christmas light that suddenly came on and you could see just that little bit clearer where before you were almost literally in the dark.

I think for me personally, it was important to know that my early years of Christian life was fuelled by biblical truth. Uncompromising biblical teaching is central to every Christian's faith and church life. It clarifies what Jesus said in John 8:32 that "[you] will know the truth and the truth will set you free."

The freedom which biblical truth brings has also had practical implications in many areas of my life. Let me share just 2 quick examples.

As many of you may know, I am trained as an architect. It is a vocation which I love and fits me like a glove. After 7 long but fun years of training, I was raring to conquer the world for God in architecture. But, just as my career was taking off, there grew in me a terrible conviction that there was nothing more important than preaching Christ and making him known. For an entire year, I struggled with God that no, He could not possibly be calling me to give up all that I had worked so hard for. What would people think? What would I tell my parents? It was a hard struggle.

Finally, after a year of wrestling with God, I gave in and agreed to look into the possibility. I signed up at a seminary and began to explore what such a calling might look like. To cut a long story short after more thought, prayer, and much to my utter relief, I came to the realization that I did not possess the necessary skill-sets for the ministry or for the mission field. Even though I was convinced beyond any doubt that indeed God's priorities are in both the ministry and the mission field, nevertheless that did not necessarily mean that He was calling me specifically to either of those vocations. As you can imagine, I was much relieved not least because I knew what the costs are for either of those calling and I feared that I lacked not only the requisite skills but also the faith and capacity for the high callings and deep responsibilities. But the important lesson for me was that I needed to be careful that I did not love anything in this world more than I loved God. Matt 10:37-39 became very clear to me. You know the verses which say,

³⁷ "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."

God had to bring me to a point where I was willing to give up the things I held dearest - my comforts, my career, my identity, my very self – to be willing to deny them and give them up before he said, 'OK, now we can move on.'

Even though I was 'off the hook,' I had a niggling suspicion that God was not done with me yet. Though he had let me off easy this time, I suspected that he would exact a price to be paid later. And so it was that a number of years afterward, when I was first introduced to Poh Lian, she was a doctor on her way to return to Malaysia because of her conviction that God was calling her back to serve there. And so when we first met, one of the things she wanted to know upfront was, 'Was I willing to move back to Malaysia?' Because if I was not, then our budding relationship was not going to go anywhere. I explained that though I myself had thankfully come to the conclusion that as a single I was not called to the mission field, nevertheless, I had no doubt that God's heart is in the mission field and that if she felt strongly called, I had no reservations about supporting her in her call to serve God there.

And so, I conclude.

In terms of convictions, things I hold as core to who we are as Christians, it is firstly an unshakeable faith in God's truth and its ability to set us truly free to be who He created us to be if only we would listen, obey and yield to its freedom.

A second conviction is that life has meaning because of who God is and what he is doing in creation and eternity.

Without faith in His word and in His purpose, I do not know how you can have any certainty, peace or joy in life. But if you do have that certain faith, all else pales in comparison and in them are true joy.