



Blessed by God

by William Angerman

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My spiritual walk, beginning with childhood, is summed up by the beautifully perceptive prayer of St. Augustine on the human condition:

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

This restlessness has always been present in me, and therefore I do not have a specific conversion story or a turning-point moment that brought me to my knees. What I have experienced is a slow, year-by-year growth in my yearning and a year-by-year blessing of the Holy Spirit in finding the rest St. Augustine identifies.

In Gordon T. Smith's book, *Beginning Well*, he talks about second-generation Christians. Smith says, "The children of believers are, in the language of Paul, 'holy' or 'sanctified' (1 Cor. 7:14). But though these children have a special identity before God, every Christian tradition affirms the need for a conscious adult appropriation of the faith of their parents."

My mother was the family spiritual leader. She led my sisters and me in daily devotional studies, read the Bible to us, and led us in daily prayer. My father was much quieter in his religion, but lived his faith as salt and light. I remember a time when I was about eight or nine, sitting on the couch by myself after church, when I experienced what Wesley described as a warming of the heart. C.S. Lewis writes about this experience as joy. It was brief, but distinct, and has always been a touchstone for me in seeking God's presence and peace in my life. It was a feeling of awareness and a sense of belonging, but not yet a faith

commitment or repentance. It was for me a high point along the continuum of the work of the Holy Spirit in my life and a beginning of my restlessness for understanding and a willingness to surrender to God's love.

My father was a U.S. Army officer who spent 23 years in the service. I grew up in Germany, Maryland, Okinawa, and Missouri. From the age of seven to ten years old, I lived in Okinawa, and I have some vivid memories of typhoons and unexploded ammunition from World War II in our grade school playground. But mostly I remember playing baseball and realizing that other people in the world were very different from Americans, often very poor and desperate as their homes were destroyed by typhoons and they were forced to live in caves.

I was close to these events because my family became very good friends with a missionary family that lived in a thatched Okinawan house in the village. The Ketchums were Canadians who had a young son and daughter. Two items about Mr. Ketchum were of great interest to me. First, he played the trumpet in church and in his mission worship services, and he gave me my early trumpet lessons. Second, he had a sailing ministry. Sailing in the Ryukyuan Islands was dangerous, and on two occasions he lost his boat in a typhoon with the loss of three crewmen. The Ketchums witnessed to me by their living and preaching the Gospel. Their example had a very lasting effect on me because of the clear and substantial sacrifice they made as missionaries. God placed these



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experiences and thoughts in my heart, and I still reflect on them to this day.

As I grew and moved on in my search, I met Debbie, my wife of thirty-eight years, during our senior year in college. We both had come from Christian homes and Presbyterian churches. But we really did not explore our Christian beliefs as much as we just shared common values while in college. After graduation I was commissioned in the Army, and we went to Germany for three years and had our first baby. It was after we returned to El Paso and joined the First Presbyterian Church there that we both began to explore our faith and beliefs. When you have your first child, you almost always get serious about what is really important and begin to ask the why and how questions of life. Debbie and I have done this together, and in so doing made our Christian faith the cornerstone of raising our family and growing together.

After six years in the field with armored cavalry units, the Army sent me to Indiana University to get a Masters degree in English literature in preparation to teach at West Point. This was my immersion into the world of ideas, and I loved it. Thus began my real thirst for knowledge and education. At West Point I was given the opportunity to have a philosophy tutorial for two summers under a well-known, respected professor from New York University. It was during this time that I began my intellectual quest for God. First, did God exist? What are His attributes, and is He the loving relational God of Christians? What about Christ as Lord and Savior? It was then that I found C.S. Lewis in the library by pure accident (providence?). I read all Lewis' non-fiction, *Mere Christianity*, *God in the Dock*, *Miracles*, *The Problem of Pain*, *The Four Loves*, *The Screwtape Letters*, and my favorite, *The Great Divorce*. Here I found the answer that the philosophies that I had been studying could not provide—a systematic, liveable worldview. Also during this time at West Point, Debbie and I attended a Bible study and met with some wonderful Christian witnesses who encouraged us. This was our first experience of a small faith group outside the formal church setting, and we both realized the importance of small groups. Actually the Army is filled with faithful and loving Christians and is a wonderful place to grow in faith.

In the Army it is not allowed to overtly preach your faith. However, it is permissible to have a Bible on your desk. As an officer, you are in a position of authority, but unlike the Roman centurion, you cannot influence your soldiers directly in their religious beliefs. However, as a junior officer, leading dozens of soldiers, and as a senior officer, leading hundreds of soldiers, you can very easily witness your faith by your actions and relationships. When I was a commander, my soldiers clearly knew I was a Christian by my personal practice of faith and attending and participating in the chapel activities of the unit. As a squadron commander, I had a chaplain assigned to me and was able to mentor him and support his Christian activities in the unit such as prayer breakfasts, services in the field, and family nights.

With the authority to punish soldiers through fines, reduction in rank, and court martials, even putting soldiers in jail, it was important for me to remember to have a compassionate, forgiving, loving heart. In the Army, I followed the example of a number of Christian leaders who followed Christian values in all relationships.

Since the time as a junior officer, I have read hundreds of books, and have both seriously studied the Word of God and taught courses, including a C. S. Lewis course and the Christian Classics Series by Foster. It is through study that I grow in my faith. For me personally, it is my head that moves and directs my heart. Since I have an hour commute to and from work, I regularly listen to the great teaching ministries of Alistair Begg, R.C. Sproul, Charles Stanley, and Steve King, which I find inspiring.

However, the event that most clearly revealed God's will and kingdom to me was my Emmaus Walk four years ago. Although an emotional experience, it was, more importantly, a Spirit-filled gathering where the love of God was apparent and visible. Setting aside two and a half days to focus solely on my relationship with God and seeing Christ in others provided a time when the promise of the presence of the kingdom of God in my life was fulfilled.

Three years ago I was researching on Google, preparing to teach a C.S. Lewis class at my church, and I stumbled upon the C.S. Lewis Institute website. Wow, the Institute was within a mile of my office and had a Fellows program. I signed up. I

cannot begin to express what a blessing and encouragement this program and, more importantly, the Fellows and staff at the Institute have been to Debbie and me over the last two years. This year I will mentor the men's first year Fellows and Debbie will be a first year Fellow as well. I have found the "rest" of which Augustine speaks, but at the same time I am moved to seek God more than ever before. I wish to use my blessings and the fruits of the Spirit in whatever way God leads me. I have put my teaching and administrative abilities to use at my church by serving on a spiritual formation committee and by developing and teaching Bible study classes. Because of the C.S. Lewis Fellows program, I have become an advocate for a more evangelical perspective, and have provided meaningful resources from the Fellows program to my church leadership and fellow Christians in my classes and covenant groups.

Personally, as I look toward retirement, it has become clear to me that spiritual growth and

servicing is where I want to spend my time. Debbie and I agree in our vision for our retirement years that we want to be active in the church and be intentional about serving. We have not yet figured out exactly how God will lead us to accomplish this.

I live in complete assurance of my salvation. The promise of the new covenant is that Jesus has atoned for my sins, and God will accept me as new. All this, including my faith, is by God's grace alone. I gain great strength and solace in the promise that heaven is for sinners who wish to be saints. I wish to be a saint, and through God's grace I am.

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