

Life Was All About Me

A Fellows Feature

by Thomas W. Simmons

2003 Senior Professionals Fellows Class

Having completed four years as an officer in the U.S. Air Force, I began my business career in the early 1970s as a young Wall Street executive. I was highly motivated and well trained to pursue the world of finance. Although I was married with two young children, my work consumed much of my time and energy and was very important to me – too important.

Success came quickly. I was considered a leader with a bright future and so was placed on a fast track and given increased responsibilities, which of course required more of my time and attention. The financial rewards were intoxicating, and, although we have never lived extravagantly, money and income became the measuring stick of success in the competitive business world in which I was thriving. Recognition and accolades can easily deceive, and I believed that my success was a product of my own capabilities. I had grown up being told that I could accomplish anything that I chose to undertake through hard work. Life was all about me.

Growing up, my family had regularly attended church, because it was the acceptable thing to do, but I remember no real spiritual dimension and certainly no genuine faith either in church or at home. My wife, too, had been raised going to church, so as young parents we had our children baptized and took them to church from time to time.

In 1984, our daughter, then a sophomore in high school, started attending Young Life with her friends. She became more active and enjoyed the fellowship and the teaching. Then, after a week at Young Life Summer Camp, she came to a saving knowledge of Christ.

As she grew in her faith, she brought home several books written by Bill Bright. My wife, Blair, started reading the Bright material. Soon she, too, was convicted of her need for Christ and committed her life to Him a short time later. While they attended church together, occasionally accompanied by our son, I joined my buddies for our weekly racquetball session. When either of them talked with me about matters of faith, I would reply, "It's fine for you, but I'm not interested."

During this time, I could feel myself growing increasingly distant from my family.

In 1985, when our son Tom went off to college, he was a decided atheist. But amazingly, among his group of new friends were a couple of guys who were active in Campus Crusade at his university. He enjoyed the gatherings he attended with them, but especially relished the stimulating debates about what they believed to be true.

One of these young men spent part of the Christmas holidays in our home one year, and the following summer invited Tom to attend La Vida, a two-week program in the Adirondack Mountains sponsored by Young Life. When we picked Tom up at the airport after La Vida, the first thing he said to us was, "My life will never be the same." We indeed could actually see a change in him that day, and we watched his new faith continue to alter his whole life from that time.

While my wife and daughter embraced and encouraged Tom's new-found faith with joy, I was unable to share in their joy and just could not connect. Although I wasn't disdainful of their faith, it didn't make sense to me and certainly did not fit into my lifestyle. My family was going in one direction and I in another.

By 1988, both kids were in college. The estrangement between Blair and me, although beneath the surface, was unbearable to me. Finally, I announced to her that I was moving out of our home. But, living in a one-bedroom apartment with rented furniture in Rosslyn, my life was not improving. Our son would regularly tell me, "I'm praying for you, Man!" My usual response was a curt, "Don't bother!"

While my work continued to go well, it no longer provided the thrill and the adrenaline that it had in the past; it no longer occupied the prominent place in my life that it had for so long. During this period, I was sinking into a state of despair. I could see no way out of my misery.

Mercifully, it was at this lowest point that the Lord showed me that I had been wrong all of those years. I had a painfully clear picture of the mistakes I had made and the people I had hurt. I realized that incorrect assumptions and wrong focus had controlled my life.

Reading Josh McDowell's *More Than A Carpenter*, I

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began to understand what had been such a mystery to me before: it wasn't all about me. Life, in fact, was all about the Word made Flesh. By God's grace to me in Christ and through my family, my sins were forgiven and our relationships mended. A bright new hope lay ahead.

Believing there was much ground to make up, I quickly immersed myself in the audio tapes of several highly regarded teachers. John Howe's recorded preaching and teaching at Truro Church, Fairfax, Virginia, made a big impact on me early on, as did the book *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. R.C. Sproul's books, tapes, and conferences have also provided a strong theological foundation over the years.

I first became aware of the C.S. Lewis Institute when I went to hear John Stott speak at a conference. The Institute's appeal to thoughtful believers resonated with me, and over the years I regularly attended the programs sponsored by the Institute.

Later, I had the opportunity to become good friends with Institute staff members, Tom Tarrants and Jim Beavers. Through them I became familiar with the Fellows Program and its study materials. When a group for Senior Professional Men began in September 2003, I eagerly enrolled. The goal of "Finishing Well" sounded right to me.

Because ministries for youth have impacted our family so powerfully, Blair and I have maintained a lively interest and involvement in Young Life, Campus Crusade, and, more recently, Trinity Christian School of Fairfax. Our children have continued to grow in their faith. Our daughter worked for Prison Fellowship for two years before becoming a full-time mom for two little boys. Our son went to seminary after college and was ordained. Today, he is Rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Purcellville, Virginia. Both are blessed with godly spouses and are raising their children to know and love the Lord. We have many reasons to thank and praise God.

During a conversation in June 2001, a family friend, the Rev. David Prior, asked if I had ever considered full-time work in a ministry. At the time I was a Managing Director of a venture capital firm and flatly told David that the thought of full-time ministry had never crossed my mind. He nodded and suggested that I pray and listen for the Lord's direction.

Two years later in the summer of 2003, my friend Tom Tarrants invited me to breakfast. At that meeting he described a new long-term strategic plan being adopted by the Institute. The changes in view were quite substantial, and he told me that he and others thought my gifts and experience would be invaluable in helping the Institute turn that vision into reality. After a lengthy process of discernment, I finally joined

the Institute in January of this year as Executive Vice President.

Like so many of us, I look back in wonder and gratitude at what God in His mercy has done in my life. I am humbled and thankful that He has given me the privilege of being part of such important work in building His kingdom at this time in history, and I am relying on His promise to complete the good work He has begun in me.



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