

June 1, 2020

Since Time began there have been "*wars and rumors of wars*" as well as plagues, earthquakes and a host of other difficult events that have challenged and tested every generation. And for 2000 years (beginning with the Story of the Book of Acts) God has used "*ordinary*" people to carry His Message of Hope and Eternal Life into the "Spiritual Awakenings" that often occur during and after each Crisis.

About 10 years ago a group of older men met one evening to remember and reminisce about their long friendship and Christian fellowship that had begun during the tumultuous 1960's and 1970's. They spent the evening taking turns reading aloud through the attached Ten "Ordinary Men".

One of the men rediscovered the booklet recently, and called another of the six survivors to visit about it. Rereading the booklet and visiting brought back a host of memories.

Most of the men are now in their 80's and 90's. It seems time to pass on the memories so others can vicariously enjoy them. As the booklet notes, it is a little like seeing the group of young men in the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, as they went through their era in History.

Hopefully, reading this account will encourage those who are going through the mounting Pandemic, Economic and now Racial Crisis. Perhaps, many years from now, groups of believers from today's Era will gather for their own reunion and rejoice how God once again brought "*beauty out of ashes*"!

Note: This insert continues the tradition in the booklet of discussing the men "*based on occupations rather than names, to emphasize the wide range of gifts and lives God brought together.*"

TEN “ORDINARY MEN”

“...unschooled, ordinary men.....and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13 NIV)

TEN “ORDINARY MEN”

Welcome! It is a delight to be together. There is a great joy whenever believers meet together—and this evening is even more significant, since our relationship with one another began about 40 years ago and has contributed so much to our lives and the work God has given us to do.

Our meeting tonight is reminiscent of the movie, *“Chariots of Fire”*. The scene opens at the funeral of one of the last survivors of a small group of British athletes who ran in the 1924 Olympics. The story then flashes back and chronicles a few exciting years in the early lives of these men as they train and run in a unique contest that drew international attention. The event made history, not because of athletic significance, but because one runner put his open acknowledgement of God above earthly fame for himself or his country, by refusing to run on Sunday, or, as he called it, *“The Sabbath”*. The movie ends with a short notation about the career of each athlete, including the man who stayed true to his faith, and later served as a missionary to China and died in a Japanese prison camp.

While our gathering here may resemble that movie, we decided not to wait for a funeral to say what we want to say. We don’t want to be like a friend of ours, who knew he was dying. After requesting that he be allowed to hear what was going to be said at his memorial, he exclaimed poignantly, *“Oh, I wish I could be there and hear it!”*

We've come together tonight to thank God and one another for all He has done for us, and through us, as we have walked with Him, and sometimes with one another, over a large part of our lives. Let's begin by looking at some of the first men who followed Jesus, then we can review what God did during the time period, or era, when we came together.

The First Followers

The Bible states that Peter, James and John were partners in a fishing business in Galilee. Today, we would probably consider them owners of a “small business” operating in a small rural community—and we would probably conclude they were rather “*ordinary*” men.

The Gospels record the meeting of these three fishermen with Jesus and their decision to follow Him. About three years later, shortly after Jesus' ascension, His followers began to spread His message to the world. Sometime later, Peter and John were imprisoned for talking about Jesus. They were later released, but not before the authorities noted these two men were “...*unschooled, ordinary men.....and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*” (Acts 4:13 NIV)

The balance of the New Testament (and history), paint a picture of how these “*ordinary*” men, who were fishermen by trade, were changed and used mightily by God during their generation—and beyond.

For example, the Apostle John wrote the “*Gospel of John*”, which proved to be one of the most, if not the most, powerful

evangelical statements of all time. He also gave the world, the beautiful little “love letters” we have come to know as “1st, 2nd and 3rd John”. Finally, toward the close of his life, while imprisoned on the Island of Patmos, John wrote his final, and very complicated, “Book of *Revelation*”.

And the Apostle Peter, by the time he died, had given the world what many believe was the basis for Mark’s “*Gospel*”, and two short, but powerful letters, known in the Bible as “1st and 2nd Peter”. For centuries, the Roman Catholic church has traced the Papal position back to Peter.

For the past 2000 years, other “*ordinary men*” have sought to “*follow Jesus*” and continue His work in their generations. The account set forth on the following pages is simply one more such story, which took place during our time in history.

The Era

Often, we cannot see the significance of our time in history when it is happening. During the battle, we can be so busy fighting alligators, that we don’t see the whole swamp. It is only in retrospect, through the rear view mirror, that we then realize what has occurred. It has become apparent that we were privileged to begin our walk together during a very special time in history. Such an era is so important that we shouldn’t neglect to think about it, talk about it, remember it, and thank God and those who were involved in it.

Life changing eras such as we experienced, often last only a decade or two, but their effects resonate for years. For example, the “Wild West” we remember so fondly, began shortly after the end of the Civil War in 1865 and was

basically completed around 1880. The Great Depression and WWII era began about 1930 and was over by 1945. Similarly, the journeys of the Apostle Paul were believed to have occurred within about 15 years, roughly between the mid 40's and about 60 A.D.—but the events during those few years changed the world.

In retrospect, it appears the years from the early 1960's into the mid 1970's were another such era. This was a wrenching period as we engaged in an “active war” in Viet Nam and the “cold war” with Russia. Anti-war protests, racial sit-ins and marches, student riots and simmering labor disputes boiled over and resulted in wide spread “mob action” and physical violence—including the assassinations of Jack and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Traditional values were abandoned and openly ridiculed and mocked. President Johnson's “Great New Society” brought new millions to the welfare roles, opened wide the gate for immigration, and began the enactment of a string of new laws conveying special rights based on race, gender, age, handicap, etc.

But as the world convulsed with its problems, God was beginning what some later called the “*Jesus Movement*”. While the physical realm grew darker, a spiritual army, particularly of young people, gradually began to assemble. God put on the hearts of numerous individuals, including each of you, the need to reach out through churches and “para-church” and mission groups of all kinds, in order to reap the harvest of what was being sown through the world's chaos.

Those of us around this table tonight are a small band of modern day, “*ordinary men*”, who were blessed to come together and to follow Jesus in our community during those turbulent 1960’s and 1970’s. Our group was simply a microcosm of the great work God was doing all across the country, and perhaps the world. We usually cannot see or appreciate history while we live it. Perhaps it will now be clarified as we look back about 40 years and review what happened to a few “ordinary” men as they followed Jesus through their time in history.

The Men

What follows is a snapshot of each of those in our group, from one man’s perspective. It is based on occupations rather than names, to emphasize the wide range of gifts and lives God brought together. While “*schooled*” for our secular work, most of us had no formal “*schooling*” in Biblical matters. Hopefully, this booklet will be a catalyst for our discussion tonight, as well as a memory to enjoy as we grow older.

A Convenience Store Owner

Our “Ring Master” (to use a phrase he employed at times for those who coordinate an effort), was in his mid-thirties when he came to town around 1965 to start a chain of convenience stores. Earlier, this Store Owner had been “discipled” by a man who learned from the founder of the “Navigators”. For the next ten years, he carried out his secular occupation in our city, and at the same time worked with many individuals and groups. His goal was not to capture any of us for a cause

or an institution, but to help raise up followers of Jesus. In his later years he freed himself from many of the demands of the secular world, which enabled him to travel throughout the world, as he served on the Boards of a major seminary and several other national and international Christian organizations.

After over 50 years of marriage, his wife, best friend and partner in life and service left last year to be with Jesus. He continues to serve the Lord, still asking Him for (and so far receiving), a man a year to “disciple”, as he prepares to move into his 80’s.

An Oil Man

Dressed in cowboy togs, and with a Bible in his hand, this Oil Man gradually moved from making oil deals, to training up disciples for Christ. As he moved about, he often quoted a familiar scripture: 2 Timothy 2: 2. Year after year he, with his faithful wife, immersed us in the beauty and input from week long seminars at Glen Eyrie retreat center, which became an annual summer vacation and spiritual uplift for many of us and our wives. Over the years, “Cowboy” was used by God to transform hundreds of men and women, by helping them memorize scripture and grow in Christ. Quietly and faithfully, he served as a state-wide representative of a Christian organization until his death.

A Pastor

Few of us, who are trained and educated in our own special field, have the courage or the humility to be trained later by

“ordinary, uneducated men”. Our Pastor was such a man! He welcomed our Ring Master’s input and quietly “submitted” to others in our group, to gain what God had for him to receive, at the same time he was sharing with others what God was giving him. He had the wisdom to augment his pastoral duties by teaching and training other men and women in his congregation, until the church ultimately grew to one of the largest in the city. At age 70, he “retired” to spend his years preaching, teaching and training believers around the world. That is where he and his loyal wife are tonight.

A Credit Company Owner

Our “Bill Collector”, as he deferentially referred to himself, was actually highly trained in money matters, with a Master’s degree from Harvard Business School. Ever eager to learn, he willingly followed our Ring Master, our Oil Man and others to gain what God had given them to distribute. Seeing the destructive side of debt which placed millions in bondage (Proverbs 22:7), he began to write books and teach about eliminating debt. At age 58, he sold his business to make himself more available to Christ, and immediately helped found a Christian Financial Ministry which ultimately reached across the world. Now 80, he and his wife who has so effectively co-labored with him, serve their own family and others, from teenagers to retirees, helping them become “free” in Jesus—including freedom from the “Debt Trap”.

A Judge

Some men look judicial, speak judicial and are judicial. Our Judge was obviously born for the work he did throughout his life. He took the skills he learned in his legal work, and the wisdom he received from the Bible and other believers, and moved deeply into “peacemaking” and “conciliation”, particularly for believers and Christian groups. Here he brought resolution to the separation and hurt he saw in divorce and other conflicts. Ultimately, he became Chairman of the Board of a major international Bible Study group, which has brought God’s Word to thousands of believers. Now in his seventies, he and his faithful life-mate continue to love and care for the family God brought into the world through them, while serving their church and other groups and individuals.

An Urban Leader

This 20 year old was a transplant from a small rural community, who moved into the inner city, to begin a life work of reaching the poor for Christ. Attracted to the Ring Master, and somewhat awed by being in the presence of a group of older (30’s and 40’s) men, he delighted the rest of us with his transparency, honesty, and gift of friendship. He started as a Bible Study and student leader of a small men’s house in a fledgling new mission organization. Today, as he nears age 60, our Urban Leader has become a national force in this now mature mission organization, which is planting churches, operating camps and schools, and conducting

internet studies for the urban poor throughout the United States and other countries. Married to a dear “fellow worker” from their mission group, God has blessed them with a family and a multitude of friends.

A Car Dealer

Once our Car Dealer decided to follow Christ, he sold Jesus with the same fervor he sold Jeeps. Enthusiastic, outspoken, infectious with love and a desire for others to know the faith he had found. After selling his auto company, he moved into the corporate world, and mixed it all with Bible memorization, men’s studies and a great affection for the city where he was born and raised. As he enters his 70’s, he and his lifelong wife and companion continue to serve their family and community, as they spend these later years residing in the home where he was raised.

A Funeral Director

Born into a “funeral home” family, this man was “born again” in his early thirties. The change was remarkable as he shifted from seeking influence through worldly institutions, to concentrating his life on bringing Jesus to his family and the myriad of grieving families he served each year. Sensing the need for pastors to come together as brothers in Christ, rather than as competitors for members, our Funeral Director found a unique ministry in quietly serving church “ministers”, while he and his gracious wife also reached out to younger men and women, through Bible studies and other relationships. Now entering his seventies, he seems most

contented as he “gardens” in their beautiful cemetery, as a son provides the leadership of another generation for their Christ centered work.

A Printing Plant Manager

God emphasized works over words in our Plant Manager’s life. He lost his father and mother early in life, accepted Jesus at age 12 (during a “revival” by a blind, trumpet playing evangelist), and faithfully followed Christ the rest of his life. Blessed with a wife uniquely gifted in words, they were a stalwart team as they reached out to their family, their church, and other young people in schools and clubs. Following the death of his first wife, he remarried. Now in their upper seventies, they provide senior leadership in their local church. He enjoys regular time and prayer with some other “old geezers”, who encourage and build each other up.

A Labor Lawyer

After arguing with God for many years, this Labor Lawyer finally “*gave God all he was able and accepted Jesus as divine*” during his early forties. Again, the change was dramatic. Instead of conflict, he began to see harmony as he attempted to bring Biblical principles into his family, his office and the sometimes tense areas where he worked. He, too, was blessed with a life time wife, who uniquely complemented him with her gentle spirit and God given gifts of love and laughter. Recently widowed, after 61 years of marriage, and now approaching age 85, he continues to speak, teach and write, attempting to love his family and others, especially through the thoughts and words God gives him.

The Conclusion

Our time together tonight is a rare opportunity. In view of some of our ages, we probably will never have a gathering like this again—unless we want to start a “*Last Man’s Club*”.

It is not sad to reach the finish line. It is what we have all been running toward. However, before we go, let’s talk, and laugh and remember the past—and also share with one another what plans we believe God has for our future.

Then, we can schedule a real “reunion” for Heaven!

“Thank You Lord—

and

Thank You, Brothers!”