

God in the Everyday and Ordinary “Growth in the Slow Lane”

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Testimony

Don't you just love those Nikki Cruise dramatic stories of people coming to faith? Fireworks and celebrations. Well, sorry to disappoint, that's not tonight's talk. I don't have one of those stories so as you listen this evening you will hear my story – in the slow lane. Hopefully as an encouragement to those of you who do not have a dramatic story. I thought I will share bible verses that relate to what I'm saying, and you might take these away from tonight.

There was no lightning experience or dramatic moment that I can identify as the moment my faith became real but as I look back, I can see that God has been quietly threading Himself through every chapter of my life. Psalm 139 says:

Psalm 139:16

“¹⁶ All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

And like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we often realise only in hindsight: **He was with us all along.**

I am hoping that as I share my testimony ‘God in the every day and the ordinary’ that my story will be a testimony to this truth: **Spiritual growth is often slow, steady, and hidden — but no less miraculous.**

1. GOD'S HAND IN MY FOUNDATIONS

I grew up in a large and very happy Catholic family. I was the eldest of 5 children, twenty-two cousins on one side, nineteen on the other – life was cousins, life was family, life was fun and that in itself is a privilege.

At junior school, there were three cousins in every year group for three years running. It wasn't a school; it was a family reunion with uniforms. But in that chaos was something precious:

- Like it or not you would never miss church on a Sunday.
- Learnt prayers such as 'when I lay down my head to sleep, night prayers formed our early bedtime routines
- Feast days never meat -always fish for supper.
- Rituals – routines morning and evening prayers, learnt prayers, rosaries! Catholicism has rituals and disciplines, some of which are ridiculous, but others have been a real blessing to me in my later life. I have found that things learnt as children are much easier to readopt later in life.
- A sense of belonging – grandparents were matriarchs and so long as we played within the rules we had a lot of fun. We could be mischievous, but heaven help us if we were rude.

At the time, it was simply "normal life." But now you can see what it really was: **God laying foundations before you even knew you'd need them.**

Deuteronomy 6:7 says,

Deuteronomy 6:7

"7 Impress these things on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road."

My family did exactly that — not perfectly, but faithfully.

And this is a word for us today:

- Rituals shape souls.
- Rhythms form hearts.
- Habits become spiritual muscle memory.

And for those who didn't grow up with them. It is never too late to begin building holy rhythms. For those that have families, don't underestimate the importance of what you are doing.

This is how God often works:

- Not with thunder, but with nudges.
- Not with certainty, but with gentle direction.
- Not with a map but with the next step.

2. GOD'S HAND IN OUR FORMATION

My teenage years took me to Lourdes. My grandfather was very involved with the charity taking people with additional needs to Lourdes, he was also very eccentric and single handed took 9 grandchildren between the age of 9 and 13 to Lourdes –a place where compassion, service, and the Holy Spirit met me. I was thrown into caring for disabled children at the age of 12, which is not something most children do on their holidays. But I loved it and this is where I was filled with the Holy Spirit. I didn't know what it was or meant. I didn't tell anyone. But this experience became an anchor through the turbulence of adolescence. This experience pulled me back year after year.

God often plants seeds long before we know what they will grow into.

From junior school to secondary school – in true Catholic style I went to a convent. The education was terrible but there was an eccentric nun there who taught me chemistry A level, who, unbeknown to her steered the next phase of my life.

This is an encouragement – sometimes a simple comment, a smile, something very ordinary to us can have an impact that is far reaching. I believe we often don't know the effects of these things to stop us getting too proud.

She simply said she thought I'd be a good nurse.

I was simply 17 and thought this a daft idea.

She said it again a few weeks later so to keep her off my back from saying it a third time I applied to do nursing but told her I wasn't going to go. I can remember, she smiled and I thought - you see!

Barts had the shortest application form so that's where I applied. But of course, as we know, I wasn't going to be a nurse.

A level results, two offers:

- Microbiology at Nottingham — the sensible choice, my choice, a good choice.
- Nursing at Barts — daft choice

And then, out of nowhere, I said, "I'm going to do nursing." I honestly don't know where those words came from, it was news to me as I said it and rather confusing to mum and dad who thought I was heading to Nottingham. I am SO grateful that God spoke in that moment, I've had the most amazing fun, fulfilling career – and why would I have thought I wanted to do microbiology! No disrespect to the amazing microbiologists but it is not me.

God spoke through you before you realised it was Him.

Proverbs 16:9 says, *“In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.”* He was establishing yours.

Proverbs 16:9

“9 In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.”

3. GOD’S HAND IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

And so to nursing - I moved to London at 18, into a grotty flat in the East end of London, Hackney with three other nurses. We were burgled if we all did the same shift. We were chased home. We lived with mice, adrenaline, cheap food, and the thrill of independence. It was home.

And yet God's hand was still here. He placed a priest in my path (Fr. Steven) who kept my faith alive. On my first placement, he came to the ward to say hello to everyone and spots me as a new fresh face, after a chat invites me to mass. He understood shift patterns, exhaustion, and the need for short, simple Masses. He had two services a day in the maternity outpatients— one after the night shift, one after the early shift — and they never lasted more than half an hour. Perfect.

God provided exactly what I needed, exactly when I needed it. A nominal faith held on, like a threaded garment but it was still attached. Then came Duncan who didn't have faith and if anything was perhaps bemused that young people still did however he was supportive, curious, amused, but open.

From dating to engagement and then to marriage but marriage has a preparation course – yika doodles. Living in London, getting married back at home – “what do we do? I'll ask Fr Steven!” He was happy to do this and so we plan to meet on a Saturday afternoon, Duncan a little nervous, thinking “what do I say, what do I do?”

The situation changed when after 45 mins Fr. Steven paused the session, opened a drawer, pulled out a tiny radio, and checked the half-time football scores. Duncan's shoulders dropped six inches. "Ah," he thought, "I can talk to this man."

6 weeks of marriage preparation became 6 months as we met weekly in the pub, it became discipleship. It became friendship. It became a safe place to ask hard questions. Our friendship still goes on, we went and stayed with him when he was posted to Australia, again in Dublin, he renewed our wedding vows at 25 years. He has been a rock in our marriage, what a privilege.

God meets us in the ordinary. In the pub. In the questions. In the people who walk beside us.

4. GOD'S HAND IN OUR AWAKENING

1993 brought a turning point – married, 2 children at this stage, now living in Bristol. *The Alpha Course!* my sister Madeleine had just completed a course and we could see such a transformation in her, something we wanted and so we waited for alpha to leave London and signed up to All Saints (Timothy Watson's time) as there were only a handful of churches running alpha in the South West. This was the nearest church to us in Bristol. We both signed up.

This was pivotal for me, up to now, my faith had been mine, Duncan was a passive supporter. I remember saying– God you had better be real if I'm wanting him to join the gang! This is the only time I have clearly laid a fleece. There are many times I have prayed God if you ... but this was different, this was a fleece with an agenda.

Judges 6:36-40

“³⁶ Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised—

³⁷ look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.”

³⁸ And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew—a bowlful of water.

³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, “Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece, but this time make the fleece dry and let the ground be covered with dew.”

⁴⁰ That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

It went like this – God, on the away day, if you are real I want to speak in tongues. It was a very clear SMART objective.

And God answered. Not because He had to. But because He delights in revealing Himself to those who seek Him.

That moment became the doorway through which Duncan walked into faith. My hunger became his invitation.

5. GOD'S HAND IN THE PRACTICES THAT HELP ME GROW

From 1993 until now, my journey has not been dramatic — it has been faithful. I've often felt frustrated, feeling that I am not growing as a Christian, not maturing, not spiritual enough.

Prayer - spiritual food

I try and pray in the morning. Not because it's easy. Not because it always feels fruitful. But because it sets the day in the right direction.

Psalm 5:3 says:

Psalm 5:3

“³ In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.”

Morning prayer is like setting the compass before the journey. It doesn't guarantee smooth roads — but it ensures the direction is right.

Some mornings, prayer feels like trying to start a car with a flat battery. Some mornings, it feels like talking into the void. Some mornings, I wonder if anything is happening at all. At other times its amazing, encouraging, bubbly and springs me off to work (via the swimming pool).

But prayer is not measured by emotion — it is measured by obedience.

And **prayer is where God slowly, quietly, faithfully shapes us.**

I think it was Spurgeon who said 'prayer is the slender nerve that turns the hand of God.'

New Wine

New Wine has been a place of excellent teaching, church fellowship, and renewal. A place to learn, to worship, to grow as a couple, to be stretched and encouraged. A family holiday place where God tills the soil of the heart. For those who haven't been and are wondering please talk to Tom, me or someone who is going this year. It's been significant to me as an individual, to us as a couple and as a family.

Fasting

I don't like fasting — few people do. I'm pretty rubbish at it but I know it is good. This Lent I tried to fast once a week until 5-6pm, not that impressive but it was something. It was obedience.

Joel 2:12 says:

Joel 2:12

“¹²Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”

Fasting is not about feeling spiritual — it is about making space for God.

Community

Friends, family, home group, spiritual direction — these are the scaffolding God uses to build us up.

Hebrews 10:24 says:

Hebrews 10:24

“²⁴ Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”

This church is amazing, its multigenerational, it caters for the traditional and the evangelical, its community, there are pockets of friendships everywhere and this is how we support each other in our faith.

7. GOD’S HAND IN OUR LONGINGS — ESPECIALLY FOR OUR CHILDREN

We have three children. Only one currently has an active faith. And my deepest desire — my persistent prayer — is that all three would know Jesus. This is the prayer of many parents. It is the ache of the heart. It is the longing that never goes away.

And Scripture speaks directly to this:

James 5:16

“¹⁶ The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

Psalm 126:5

“⁵ Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.”

I, and many others are sowing in prayer, sowing in hope, sowing in faith. And God hears every word.

But I am not the first mother to pray like this. I stand in a long line of mothers and fathers who have prayed their children into the Kingdom: Billy Graham, St Augustine.

Conclusion: GOD IN THE EVERYDAY

I am hoping that my story has shown that **God is not only in the dramatic moments — He is in the everyday moments.** He is in the rituals of childhood. He is in the nudges of a nun. He is in the chaos of a nurses' flat. He is in the priest who knows the football scores. He is in the Alpha course. He is in the slow, steady, gentle peeling back of the heart. He is in the morning prayers that feel ordinary but shape eternity. He is in the longing for your children to know Him.

Spiritual growth is not measured by speed, but by direction. Not by drama, but by devotion. Not by how loudly God speaks, but by how faithfully we walk.

And when I look back — I see that He has been there all along.



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