

Woody's Story





God is light

I grew up in Arlington, Virginia, USA with my mom, dad and older brother. I didn't grow up in home with any Christian faith, in fact, any faith at all. My only knowledge of Christianity was that of setting up a Nativity scene at Christmas time in the house. I didn't even know what that meant. I was spiritually blind and did not know that I needed my sins dealt with and forgiven. I remember in 1976 agreeing with one of my classmates in primary school that God was not real. My life was summed up in Ephesians 4:18, **"having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."**

My aunt Rosemary was a Christian and was praying for my family. She asked my mother if she would go to some Christian meetings near

where we lived. They lasted for a week. Two churches in the area were taking people to the meetings. One of the churches left an impression on my mother and she referred to them as the "church of the smiling people" because they had a genuine joy. God was working on my dad as well in those days. At the end of the week of meeting my parents decided to go to church on Sunday. They found out when the "Church of the Smiling People" (otherwise known at Barcroft Bible Church in Arlington) had services. I didn't want to go, one, because I didn't believe in God, and, two, the time of the service was at the same time Tarzan came on TV. No good. We all went. The air conditioner was broken at the church and it was hot and humid. It was 26 June 1977. All I wanted as an eleven-year-old at the time was to get back home. However,

the Gospel was preached that day and my father gave his heart and life to Jesus Christ to be his Lord and Saviour. The excitement of my dad was strange because he believed in a God that I didn't believe existed. Tarzan was far better for a Sunday. We started to give thanks at the meal table for food. This was a bridge too far in my mind. My parents started taking me to church and Sunday school on Sundays. I hated this. Who in their right mind would believe this nonsense, I thought?

Each summer in those years I would go to my grandparents' house in northern New Jersey and stay a couple of weeks. They lived on a lake, had a couple canoes, fishing rods and everything little boys would like. My grandparents were church goers but they really didn't understand much about the

Gospel: Jesus dying for their sins and rising from the dead so they could have eternal life. Reluctantly I went to church with them and then onto the Sunday school class. The teacher of the class gave a lesson on being thankful to God for the people He brings into our lives. I had no more notion of thanking this God who I didn't believe in for anything. I couldn't wait to get back to my grandparents' house, get lunch and go swimming in the lake. I had no more thought of God that day. God had other plans. That night I was getting ready to get into bed. There was a hand being placed on my shoulder and the hand pushed me to the floor. No-one was in the room other than me. The first thought that went through my mind was, "Ok, God is real!" This was a big paradigm shift for me. One moment I did not believe in

God is real!



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the existence of God, the next moment I did. I said a prayer for the first time: thanking God for the people He brought into my life. The first verse I memorised out of the Bible was 1 Thessalonians 5:18, **“in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”** Now, I didn't understand anything about the Gospel or the Bible. One thing I did know was that if God was real, then the Bible is true and God could be trusted.

I headed back home and to the church that I once hated going to.

Now I was all ears. I was eager to learn about the Bible, God and Jesus. It wasn't long after that I gave my heart and life to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour.

The Lord brought key people into my life. Dale Sutherland was a 16-year-old in the youth group who took me under his wing and disciplined me. He wrote a note in a Bible he bought me saying, “Woody – You best use this Book. The Spirit didn't give it to you so it could sit around. Open it, underline it, put it in your heart and the words within will forever

be etched in your heart. Love, Dale” Dale was a good role-model and an important friend in the early days of my Christian walk.

A testimony is not just the story of the conversion experience, but what Christ continues to do in life. My mother came to Christ the following spring in 1978. She was starting to get quite sick with kidney issues that led to being put on dialysis. Despite her illness she blossomed in her faith. She loved the Word of God and committing it to memory. After a long struggle she died in August of 1981. We moved house three weeks later because my father had gotten a new job north of Baltimore, Maryland (about 65 miles north of Arlington). The next day I went to a new school. My father remarried ten months after my mother died. I had to learn to trust the Lord through all this. It wasn't easy but

the Lord helped me greatly as a teenager.

In the summer of 1982, I went with a mission team to Portugal to do evangelism and some practical work. God sewed the seeds of being in full-time Christian ministry into my heart during that trip. I realised that there was a world outside of America that needed the Gospel as well. I was 16.

During my high school years, I never had any great desire to mess about with alcohol or drugs, but I knew a lot of kids that did. God brought someone in school across my path who smoked a lot of pot. He had professed faith in Christ but was struggling. God gave me a love for him and a desire to help him. This was the start of befriending people with addictions. I was attending a Brethren Assembly (Hillendale Bible Chapel

later called Forge Road Bible Chapel) at the time and met a guy in the church who had come off a lot of drugs. He and I became great pals. I graduated from high school and went to junior college to study electronics. I led an Inter-

varsity Christian fellowship at the college and gained lots of experience and hard lessons about life. I also worked a couple of summers for a ministry called Young Life at their camps for teens. I eventually got a Bachelor

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of Science in Computer Science from Geneva College in Pennsylvania. I thought that I could use my education in computers to help with Bible translation around the world. This was “my” plan. However, I got a job as a computer teacher in an all-girls Catholic school in Baltimore and working part time as a computer and administrative person in a large Presbyterian Church. My attitude was, “Look God, at what I can do for you.” Little did I know that God always has bigger and better plans. I found out about an opportunity to serve in Ireland with a ministry called Ireland Outreach as a computer manager in 1992. Again, more lessons about ministry and working with people. It was there that I met Elaine from Belfast. She had come from a hard background of alcohol, drugs and gangs. Elaine had been led to faith

in the Lord Jesus Christ through the witness of Pamela Brown, who now works for Stauros. Elaine and I got married in Belfast in 1994 and moved to Baltimore straight away. We went back to Hillendale and found that there were a number of people getting saved from addiction backgrounds. One of the elders started a Bible study for them and that is when Elaine and I arrived. There was a man in the group who had gotten saved from a 30-year addiction to alcohol. Elaine encouraged me to get alongside him and do a Bible study. That is when the desire to do pastoral care was recognised. Elaine had invited Stauros to come to the States to help. In 1995 Tom Eakins and Stan Gowdy came and started a relationship with us and the Chapel. Stauros gave us an invitation to come on staff in 1997 and God confirmed the call in early

1998. We arrived in Northern Ireland in the autumn of 1998. Never did I think that God would bring me into this work. I always thought that I would serve the Lord in the way I thought best. I learned this: God is not interested in what we have or what we think we can offer, He is interested in having us. We have served the Lord for over 21 years in Northern Ireland with the Stauros Foundation. God will equip the called to do His work. Philippians 2:13, **“for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”**

If you have been touched by reading this testimony, and wish to know Christ, whom Woody has been speaking of, you may begin by praying a prayer such as this, Dear Lord, I feel as though my life is without hope: I have made some very poor choices. I have often felt

that I am a failure and that others have rejected me. I feel guilty at the thought of the life I have lived so far, and I feel hopeless. I wonder if you can do for me what you have done for Woody? I know I need help, not just any help, Lord, I need your help. Sin is destroying my life, and has been destroying it for as long as I can remember. Please forgive me for all the sins I have committed, and for the times I have done things that break your rules. Please cleanse my heart from all my sin and save my life. I repent of it all. Help me to come alive in Christ, and please send your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to live in me from this moment on and for the rest of my life. Lord, I know you have something better for my life; you have a plan and purpose for me. I surrender myself to you now and ask you to take control of my life. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen



*God can be
trusted*



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