

From shepherd to king

My testimony

This article explains the principle of how Almighty God enjoys taking the simple things, the nobodies, and uses them for His glory. This is just a simple testimony of my own life, written on 4 May 2002 at the height of the land invasions in Zimbabwe.

2Sam 7:18 "Then David the king went in and sat before YHWH, and he said, 'Who am I, O Lord YHWH, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me this far?'"

This is the question David asked of God when He promised to bless David's house and establish his kingdom, promising that his sons would sit on the throne of the house of Israel forever (a wonderful promise worth studying). This promise was in response to a desire David had expressed, to build a house (temple) for YHWH.

I find this to be so special. No sooner had David expressed His desire - he hadn't even started preparations for building yet - than God was there blessing him with such an amazing blessing that David was "*blessed right out of his socks*", as the saying goes. That's our God, and that is how I have experienced Him. David's question to God is one I have often asked myself. Who am I, Lord, that You should bless me so much? You have lifted me from nothing to what I am today. I have nothing to boast of - it is all His grace!

Some have asked me to talk a bit about myself - who I am, where I have come from. I don't have much to tell really - I came from very little, just a very ordinary me. No airs and graces, no great qualifications - just very ordinary. But if I had

to tell of what Jesus has done for me, and in me, then I could just write and write and write! I love Him so very much.

I was born on the 7th of March 1955 in an insignificant town, Fort Victoria, in an insignificant Third World country, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), the youngest son of a poor farmer and his teacher wife. My three brothers and two sisters were all much older than me, and consequently I grew up somewhat of a loner and extremely shy. Not the best kind of background for a preacher, is it? I'm so glad that God does not consider man's qualifications when He calls. There David was, keeping his father's sheep in the desert. He was the last choice his own father would have made, and as for the great prophet, Samuel, he needed a special word from God before he chose David. Yet David grew to be one of the greatest kings that ever lived!

I will never forget the day God called me into the ministry. I was just a little boy of about eight, and as I said, extremely shy. I was sitting in a Dutch Reformed Church service, minding my own business, listening to the preacher speaking in high Afrikaans (like Dutch) - I had no idea what he was preaching about that day. Suddenly deep inside me a little voice said to me, *"One day you are going to be up there preaching to these people."* Wow! I got the shock of my life! I was terrified - not by the voice. That had come so quietly and gently that I hardly recognised it, and anyway, I had not known the voice of God yet. All I knew was that I had a sudden definite knowledge that I would preach one day, and that terrified me. What would I say to all those people?!

My schooling was not much to talk about. I struggled. I am technically-minded, and that kind of mind is still not well-understood by the typical academics. I was placed in an academic school and did poorly. I hated boarding school. I

hated Economics and History and English (in that order)! I gave up on the first two subjects after failing them miserably, but was told that English was really important, so when I failed O Level English (a British examination), I had to repeat it in the following June. I failed that too, and tried English a third time in November, only to fail again.

Isn't it amazing that my three weakest points are the very things God has used me in. I am now an author, I love history, and write about it, and I run a business in a complicated and difficult economic environment (2002). That's God, again.

Well, after that, I left school with only three subjects passed - Mathematics, Technical Drawing and Afrikaans. So, you might ask how I came to have a reasonable command of the English language? I told you it's all God and nothing of me! You see, I have always loved the Bible. I never cared much for other books, and my reading still is not magnificent. But I loved the Bible. Over the years I have read, and read, and read my Bible. Without realising it, I was increasing my English skills. The Bible is written in good English, and the fact that I had done so much reading improved my English! Isn't God good?!

My father died when I was six years old, and I remember very little about him. I believe that he was an upright man. My mother died when I was 19. She, too, was a godly woman.

You might say, shame, poor boy. However, I never thought of myself with any self-pity. When I was little, there was no father to fix things in the house, so I had to do it. I fixed the plugs, put up the new geyser, replaced all the old water pipes, fixed the diesel engine that was our lighting plant, built myself a canoe - all before the age of 12. We had no electricity when I was little - only candles and a wood stove. The lighting plant only came

when I was about ten. That's how it was in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) when I grew up. All the time God was training me without my knowing it, and my technical skills developed.

With the death of both my parents, something very spiritual happened. My father died of lung cancer. Three days before he died, he saw a vision of a light shining up from behind three hills. He told my mother that he could not quite see the light - only that it was shining up from behind the hills. He asked her to stop praying for him to be held back, as he wanted to go to be with his Lord. She then prayed that God's will would be done, and three days later, he died.

I had been given leave from the army and was with my mother when she died. I held her hand as she slipped into eternity. She had also asked a friend to stop praying for her to be kept back as she wanted to go. She, too, died of cancer. Folks, I know where my parents are. I do not communicate with the dead. That is forbidden in the Scriptures. But the comfort of the Scriptures, and the fact that they have gone before, has given me such a strong hope in God and in His promises of eternal life, that heaven is almost tangible to me - like I can just reach out and touch it!

This might seem cruel to some, but I know God was preparing me even through that. It is the absolute reality of this experience that has caused me to study the Scriptures deeply regarding the end times prophecies. When I teach about the subject of the Second Coming of Jesus, I don't teach it as some interesting facts - head knowledge. I teach it with a passion, because I know a day is coming when the heavens will open and I will see Jesus in all His glory, and with Him will come both my parents, also in glory, together with all the other saints and myriads and myriads of angels. What a day that will be. Are you

ready for that day?

After I left school - with very little qualifications - I could not really pick any job I wanted. Through various circumstances I found a job as an apprentice patternmaker. Apprenticeships were looked down upon by many of the people that I had been in contact with those days, so I knew, just like I did at school, that I did not really amount to much. My self-esteem was extremely low, but I was generally a happy boy.

(A Patternmaker in the foundry industry works with his hands, making wooden patterns for machine parts. Car engine blocks and gear boxes, etc. were originally made by hand out of timber by patternmakers, or so it used to be until computerised machinery was invented.)

In my third year of apprenticeship, I was called up to fight in the Rhodesian army. I was young - what did I know about politics? Call-up was compulsory, so I went. During that year, my mother died, and I felt quite alone. But not for long. You see, God has a special eye for orphans. As soon as I returned from the army, I met my wife. Six months later I was married. God replaced the void in my life with a very special person. Now, 46 years later, my wife is still my very best friend, and I love her to bits!

The year after we got married, I felt that God wanted me to go to Bible College, and so the two of us set off - young country bumpkins off to the big city of Johannesburg for two years. That was quite frightening! We completed college and were stationed back at our hometown, Gwelo (Gweru) for 18 months, then the town of my birth, Fort Victoria (Masvingo) to take over the pastorate there. Our first two children were born there.

Three and a half years later, I had to return to Gweru for another year. It was then that a pastor from Umtali (Mutare) asked me to assist in the ministry there. He said that they did not have the finance to support me, and I would need to find part-time employment. I was a qualified patternmaker by then and so I applied for a job with a foundry in that town. (The trade had been my life support while in Fort Victoria, as I worked from home - During those years I learnt what it meant to live by faith, as I did not receive any income from the church, as most ministers do these days. The foundry manager said that they did not have enough work to sustain a full-time patternmaker, but I could get all the work that they did have.

From this seed, a large business in another town heard of me, and asked me to do all their work for them from whichever town I might want to live in, and thus God opened the door for me to start a patternmaking business. This developed into a fully-fledged foundry, and though I had to move back again to Gweru after about 18 months, this business had grown to where I employed some 80 to 100 people.

Again, God used the situation to train me in the area of business. What did I know about business? I had never been trained in management or business principles. When I was originally handed a ledger book at the time that I took over the church in Fort Victoria, I had never even seen or heard about such a thing. And here I am, a managing director of a medium-sized business, with a board of directors to report to and accounts to manage. Me!? Little me!? If you had told me this 45 years ago, I would never have believed it. Yet God did it for little, insignificant me!

Don't ever underestimate what God can do in and through you! He lifted David from shepherding the sheep to being king over

Israel. He used Amos as a prophet - a simple herdsman. He chose Gideon - the least in his family - who were themselves the least in Manasseh, which, as you know, was only a half tribe. And here I am, sending out articles on the internet throughout the world from insignificant little Gweru - and people are actually reading them! Who would ever have thought that anything good could come out of Gweru, Zimbabwe! That almost sounds like the words of Nathaniel,

John 1:46 "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

That's also what the prophet Micah said of Bethlehem.

Mic 5:2 "But as for you Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth to be ruler in Israel ..."

What if Jesus had not been born in Bethlehem, do you think that the whole world would know the name of insignificant little Bethlehem, as they do today? I don't think so. You see, it was not Bethlehem who made Jesus great. It was Jesus who made Bethlehem great!

Am I proud of all my accomplishments, you may ask? No sirree! You see, I know where I've come from. I have nothing to boast of. I am still just a very ordinary person, ministering to other very ordinary people to whom I have been called. I grew up amongst the tradesmen, the farmers, the business world, and into that world He has sent me to go and make a difference. To tell people that God has not forgotten them, that He loves them, and that He is able to take their lump of ordinary clay, and make a container of honour out of it, suitable for the Master's use - unbelievable as it may seem!

He is not concerned about where you came from. What He is concerned about is **your heart**. Don't you dare underestimate what a mighty, loving Creator can do with your life, no matter how broken it might be. He can fix it so completely that you will never know that it was broken. He will make you whole again, dear friend. He will lift you up if you will only entrust your life to the Potter's loving hands.

God has enabled me to mingle with rulers and dignitaries, to lead groups of men, and even to train leaders - and to be quite comfortable in those situations. I am also totally comfortable to be amongst the lowliest of men, meeting with them on their turf, as their equal - not looking down on them from a position of superiority, but rather to come alongside them and help them up. And it is all because of the way God has led me and guided me through the years. To Him, then, goes all the glory for whatever I might have attained in this life.

I did not mention that my last two children were born during our last 16 years living in Gweru. My eldest daughter's name is Delia (turning 21 in September this year [2002] and studying to be a teacher like her precious mother), then there is Daniel (18), Rebecca (14) and Lyndie-Lee (9), all three still at school (2002). My dear wife's name is Amanda (Mandy), and I don't think she would want me to tell you how old she is!!

So, there we are. That's the brief story of my life in response to some who wanted to know who I am. I hope the brief history is a blessing to you.

With love to you all,

Henry D Jackson