

The Army and the Bible



Pages From My Life's Book (Part 3)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again. Yesterday I told you something about my educational background in Britain, how I'd been educated as a scholar at two of Britain's most prestigious institutions: Eton College and Cambridge University.

All through my teen years I always had a deep, inner conviction that somewhere there must be a meaning and a purpose to life, if only I knew where to find it. However, I became disillusioned with Christianity, as I had experienced it, in the state church of Britain. And so, in my search for truth, I turned to philosophy and to various Oriental systems; in particular, to yoga.

Academically I was successful and, at an unusually early age, I achieved a position as a professor of philosophy at Cambridge University. And yet, for all my academic success, I had not found what I was looking for. Personally, I was still baffled and confused. Philosophy had given no more help in finding the answer than Christianity had done. Where else could I look?

At this stage in my life World War II broke out and plunged the whole continent of Europe into upheaval and confusion. Mine was one of millions of lives that were permanently changed by the impact of this war. I realized that I was going to be called up into the British Army—drafted, I believe they say in America. For years I wondered what I would do when this situation came. I had always thought that the right thing to do would be to be a conscientious objector. And yet, because of my family background, that was a very difficult decision. It was not that I based my conclusions on Christianity, I based them on philosophy.

Eventually I took the stand of a conscientious objector, went before a tribunal. My objections were accepted as valid and I was drafted into the Army Medical Corps as a hospital attendant, with a guarantee that I would never be required to use military weapons. So there I was, at the end of a stage in my life, about to leave Cambridge University, about to go into a totally different type of life, totally different environment, and unknown future. The thing that troubled me most was that I was going to have to leave behind the libraries that I was used to. Up to that time I had had some of the largest and best-stocked libraries in Europe available to me any time I wanted to consult a book. Now I was going into the British Army and I knew that I would have to carry all my worldly

possessions in a long, black bag (that in the Army is called a "kit bag"), and books are heavy. I didn't want to drag a lot of books around with me and yet I just had to have something to read.

So at that point, I reasoned with myself in a philosophic sort of way and I said, "Now there's one book in the world that is more widely read and more influential than any other book in human history, and it's a kind of book of philosophy and I don't know much about it. I ought to study it." You know the book that I had in mind? The Bible. And I'm glad that even in those days I had enough sense to recognize the unique significance of the Bible in human history.

Undoubtedly, it was what I termed it, the most widely read and influential book in the history of the human race. So I determined it was my philosophic duty to take a Bible with me and read it in the Army. I bought myself a nice new black Bible and went into the British Army with it.

But I didn't realize that when a person reads the Bible in the Army he becomes extremely conspicuous. I'll always remember my first night in the barrack room with about twenty-four other new enlisted soldiers. I sat down on the bed, opened my Bible, and started to read it. I said to myself, "Where do you start any book?" and the answer is, "At the first chapter." So I began Genesis, chapter one, verse one. But, as soon as the other soldiers saw me reading my Bible, a kind of uneasy hush fell on the whole room and everybody began to look my way. But the extraordinary thing was that when I wasn't reading the Bible, I was living a life that's very unlike that of the life that's led by most people who read the Bible. I'm ashamed when I look back but I have to say this, I'd become a very heavy drinker of whiskey. I wasn't an alcoholic but, whenever I was frustrated I would turn to whiskey for release, and the only release I got was by drinking too much. Worse still, I was an habitual blasphemer. I say this with deep regret and shame but I used continually, unclean and blasphemous words. I was bad when I went into the Army and after six months in the Army I was awful.

Basically, the British Army is probably the most blasphemous group of men found anywhere in humanity. And I was as bad as the rest.

So there I was, reading my Bible, drinking my whiskey, blaspheming, baffling everybody and baffled myself. The Bible baffled me. It was the first book that I had read that I didn't understand. I didn't know how to classify it. Was it history? Was it mythology? Was it poetry? Was it philosophy? It didn't seem to fit into any of those categories. And I found it very hard going, very boring. But I was a determined kind of person and I said, "No book is going to beat me. I've started to read this book and I'm going to read it through from beginning to end." So, every day I sat down and read something out of the Bible. In fact, I read it in consecutive order, starting at Genesis, chapter one, verse one, and I went on through it.

At the end of about nine months in the Army, I had got somewhere into the book of Job and then something happened that had a transforming impact on the rest of my life.

At this stage in my life, my company was transferred to another area of England, to the county of Yorkshire. Now, I'd always grown up in the South of England. I discovered that the people in Yorkshire were unusually friendly and hospitable and they invited us soldiers into their homes for meals and so on. So I was invited into the home of some people who were Christians. But they were not the kind of Christians that I'd known. First of all, they were very humble, uneducated people. That was very clear to me, but there was something different about them. I couldn't classify it but I felt it the moment I met them and the moment I walked into their home.

They invited me for a meal and we sat around this table and the first thing they did was pray over the meal. Well, I'd never been in a home where anybody prayed over the food but I adjusted to that and enjoyed the meal and then, at the end of the meal, without any warning, they started to pray again. There were about seven or eight people around this big oval table and I realized, to my horror, that they were praying in turn and that my turn was coming, and quickly!

Now, I had never prayed out loud in public in my life, anywhere, and I had no idea what to say or do. It would be no exaggeration to say that panic gripped me. When my turn came, I opened my mouth and I blurted out these words, "Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief." And after I'd said that, my mouth shut like a trap and I could say no more. I thought to myself, "Where did I get those words from? How could I ever say anything like that?"

But I was particularly interested in the lady of the home: a little, frail woman of about maybe late fifties, who'd obviously had a pretty hard life. And she told me something that absolutely shook me. She said that in World War I her husband had been exempted from military service because it was discovered that he had tuberculosis of one lung. Well, I knew that for him to gain military exemption it had to be a valid medical diagnosis. Then she said to me, "I prayed for my husband every day for ten years." And I thought to myself, "Could anybody pray about anything every day for ten years?" I couldn't conceive a person doing anything like that.

But what she went on to say was even more astonishing. She said, “At the end of ten years I was praying alone in a room. My husband was in the bedroom, sitting up in bed, propped up on the pillows, coughing up blood. And as I was praying, an audible voice spoke to me and said, ‘Claim it!’” She said, “I answered out loud, ‘Lord, I claim it now!’” And when she said that in one room, her husband in the bed in the other room was healed of tuberculosis. When he went back to the doctor to be examined, the doctor told him that the lung that had been affected was stronger than the lung that had never been affected.

Now, these were very simple, uneducated people. I would say they were incapable of any kind of guile or superficiality. And when I heard this story of how this woman had prayed for ten years and her husband had been healed of tuberculosis, something in me said, “Is this what you’ve been looking for?” And I thought, “Maybe it is!” But I just couldn’t understand the kind of language that these people used. I could say honestly, if they’d spoken Greek, I would have understood them better. They could not communicate to me what it was that they had or how they got it.

Also, there were three questions in my mind: If I get involved in this, what will happen to my university career? What will my friends say? And what will my family say? It was bad when I became a conscientious objector, but suppose I were to become a religious fanatic? What would my family say? And so, these three questions kind of bombarded my mind. What will happen to my career? What will my friends say? What will my family say? And I was still baffled, confused, frustrated.

So, our time is up for the day but I’ll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I’ll continue the story of my search for truth. I’ll tell you how at last I found what I was looking for.

Radio Program

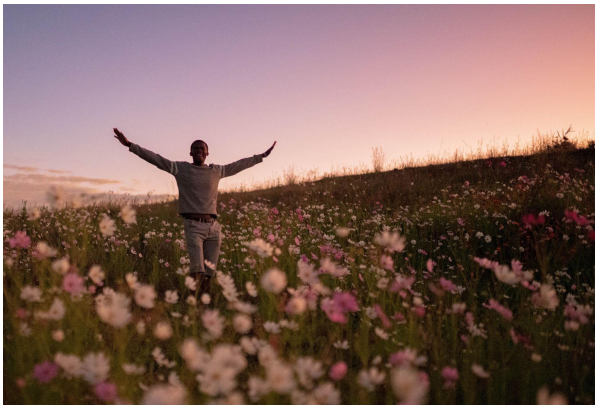
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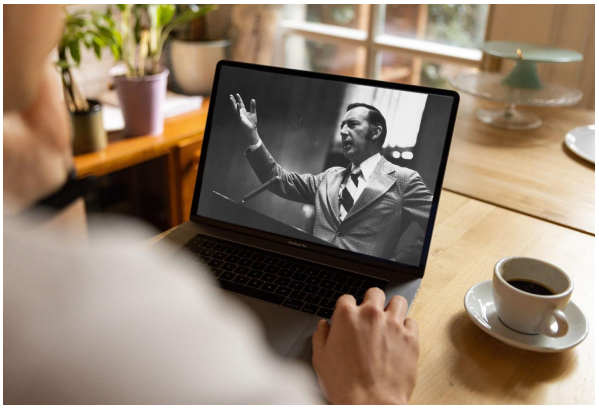
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