

Introduction

Where do you start a book like this? I suppose I could start at the beginning, when I was born. Or I could start it when I first went to school and learned that Catholics and Protestants were two different species. Or I could start it in my childhood, when I became an altar boy. Or I could start it in my early teens, when I entered the seminary to train to be a priest. Or I could start it in my early 20s when I was a hippy and joined a Christian commune. Or I could start it in my 30s, when I was a hopeless alcoholic in a psychiatric ward, and got sober through AA. Or I could start it in my 40s, when I was awarded my doctorate in psychology. Or I could start it in my 50s, when, like the prodigal son, I returned to God. Any of these points would be a viable point to begin this book. However, I feel my starting point needs to be a specific date (2nd April 2012).

Clearly, my story did not start that day, but the idea for this book did. I was out having a walk and had stopped on a bench near the university in Exeter. It was a beautiful spring day, with the sun streaming through

the trees. Just the sort of day that was perfect to sit on the bench to pray and meditate; a fairly recent habit I was trying to develop. My fledgling business wasn't exactly booming, so I wanted to pray about it and search for guidance about a way forward.

Instead of getting the hoped-for answers to my business questions, I heard God say, "I want you to write a book about your life as an ordinary saint."

"Sorry, you want me to do what? Who wants to hear about me and, besides, I'm no saint. OK, sometimes I think I am, especially when I'm arguing with my wife. I mean, a saint is a holy man and come on; nobody who knows me is going to seriously suggest that I fit that description."

"Many people will be interested in hearing about you. But the book is not about you alone. It is your relationship with me, that is the core of the book. And a saint is not a 'holy man' as you call it, that is a very human definition. I see it in a different light, my definition of a saint is someone I have chosen, and I have chosen you."

"OK, that's nice, thanks, but why an ordinary saint?"

"All the saints were ordinary. It was their relationship with me that made them extraordinary. I want people to see that if you, with all your scepticism, doubts and misgivings can come to have a relationship with me, then anyone can."

"I'm not sure that was a compliment."

"Do you need one? Well, I love you as you are."

"Hmmm"

If you are still reading this book, and you are not a practising Christian, then you might be wondering if you have just picked up a book written by a madman, or

maybe a fantasy book. There is an old saying, although I don't remember who said it: if you speak to God, you are devout; if he speaks to you, you are crazy.

In that case, I am crazy as a coot (whatever that is). God does speak to me. Sometimes he speaks very clearly, sometimes less so and sometimes through writings, such as the Bible or daily meditations, and sometimes through other people. Does that make me special? Yes and no – I do believe that God has chosen me, but he has not only he has chosen all of us, you too! He invites us all to enter into a personal relationship with him. So I am not so special to receive the invitation, although to be invited into a relationship with God is pretty special, is it not?!

What really makes us special is what happens if we accept that invitation. That is what this book is about, the transformation, transcendence and struggle that came when I said yes to a relationship with God. It is a love story, a romance, an adventure and a mystery all rolled into one. It is my story, but it is not unique.

The book is not really an autobiography as people would normally understand the term. Although it does contain lots of events from my life, some of them even in chronological order. Think of it more as a photo album, rather than a video. It is a book mostly about my relationship with God and coming to a personal understanding of who he is and how he works. It is a very personal book, full of personal insights. It is not a theological thesis; I'm not qualified to produce one. But even if I was, that is not the purpose here. My intention in this book is to pour out my personal story, my thoughts, prejudices, struggles, enlightenments and encounters with God (what Christians would call my testimony).

One thread runs through this book, namely that it is a journey. Some people travel huge distances in miles and don't move at all in their hearts; others remain where they are and move enormous distances in their hearts. For me, it is a bit of both, I have done some travelling and, hopefully, I have moved a long way in my heart also. You can be the one to decide.