

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

22 January 2018

www.chuckroots.com

The Ripon Bulletin

It's a Faith Thing

There are times in life when you have the opportunity to look back and see how events came together in a way that you simply could not have seen looking forward at that time. I'm not referring to what might be called coincidences. The path I'm talking about has to do with faith.

When I say faith, I'm not talking about crossing my fingers in hopes that everything will work out. Instead, what is at work here is my having learned to trust Jesus with my life: every aspect of it. Let me explain.

At twenty-four years of age I had an encounter with Jesus while serving in the Marine Corps. There was no doubt in my heart and mind that this meeting, if you will, took place. The realization that God loved me, and Christ died for my sins was overwhelming. I knew then I needed to surrender my entire life to him completely. I remember distinctly saying to Jesus in my prayer of surrender to him that he could have my whole life to do with as he wished. It stands to reason that if he can save me from my sin, his taking care of the remainder of my earthly life should be a cake-walk.

Some might say that's a bit risky. After all, you really don't know what following Jesus in a walk of faith may get you. That's true. But you have to remember that I was serving in the Marine Corps. And I was in Vietnam. People I couldn't see were trying to kill me. When I took the oath to serve my country, I was, in effect, signing a blank check over to the government stating that my government, the leaders of the United States, and in particular the Commander in Chief, the President, could use me up to and including the sacrificing of my life.

The decision to trust Jesus was easy compared to trusting a gaggle of politicians. After all, the politicians did not create the universe, nor the sun, moon and stars. They did not bring about the forms of life that inhabit this amazing globe we call earth. I am useful to them, yes. But they do not know me, and they certainly do not love me.

God made the universe and rules over it and all that it contains. And he doesn't even break a sweat. Politicians, on the other hand, can't even run the postal system without screwing it up. I'll take God, thank you.

When my enlistment in the Marines was up in 1973, I planned to return to college and pursue something altogether divested from the military. After

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graduating from San Jose State University in 1976, Isaura and I were married and moved to Portland, Oregon where I was to attend Western Evangelical Seminary. I wasn't sure which of the three masters programs I should take. While standing in line to sign up with the registrar, I sensed the Lord prompting me to sign up for the Master's in Divinity (M.Div) degree. But I could not shake the need to go with the M.Div.

Three years later I graduated with my M.Div. and returned to our home church in San Jose to be the youth minister, all the while seeking for an avenue to enter the field of Christian Radio & TV. The superintendent and pastor approached me the need for me to be ordained. I argued against it but they prevailed, so I went through the two-year study program to be officially ordained.

In my early thirties at this point, I felt I needed to move away from youth ministry and get into Christian Broadcasting. Nothing opened up for me, except the opportunity to pastor a church in Fresno.

While in Fresno I reenlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve as a side ministry to go along with pastoring the church. Eight years had passed since seminary and I was still wondering where I was heading in serving the Lord.

One day I received a phone call from a man who identified himself as a Navy chaplain. He had heard of me and wondered if I'd consider being a Navy chaplain. I asked him what the qualifications were. He listed three, in this order: Masters in Divinity, ordination, pastoring a church! I now saw how all three of those things came together so I would be prepared for ministry to sailors and Marines.

I had did not stayed in the Marine Corps because I did not want to keep doing for 20 years what I had been doing – fixing black boxes in jet aircraft.

I did not want to earn a Masters in Divinity because it was a three-year program, not two like the other degrees. Plus, I didn't need that degree for broadcasting. And I wanted nothing to do with Greek and Hebrew, required for the M.Div.

I also did not want to go through ordination because I felt it was a waste of time since I was going into broadcasting.

Lastly, pastoring a church was not on my list of things to do. I could not see myself preaching to a congregation.

What hit me like a bolt when presented with the Navy chaplaincy was the realization that God had been working to get me to the point where I would be qualified to serve him in the Navy.

Had I chosen to be bull-headed and not have been obedient to his promptings, I would have missed out serving 25 years as a chaplain to the men and women of the sea services. I didn't want to do it, but I'm so glad I did!