From Josh McDowell’s “More than a Carpenter”.

**My Story**

Thomas Aquinas writes: ''There is within every soul a thirst for happiness and meaning. '' I first be­gan to feel this thirst when I was a teenager. I wanted to be happy. I wanted my life to have meaning. I became hounded by those three basic questions that haunt every human life: who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? I wanted an­swers, so as 'l young student, I started searching for them.

Where I was brought up' everyone seemed to be into religion, so I thought I might find my answers in being religious. I got into church 15o percent. I went every time the doors opened-morning, after­noon, or evening. But I must have picked the wrong church because I felt worse inside it than I did outside. From my upbringing on a farm in Michigan I inherited a rural practicality that says when something doesn’t work, get rid of it. so I chucked religion.

Then I thought that education might have the answers to my quest for meaning, so I enrolled in a university. I soon became the most unpopular stu­dent among the professors. I would buttonhole them in their offices and badger them for answers to my questions. When they saw me coming, they would turn out the lights, pull down the shades, and lock their doors. You can learn many things at a university, but I didn’t find the answers I was seeking. Faculty members and my fellow students had just as many problems, frustrations, and un­answered questions as I did.

One day on campus I saw a student wearing a T ­shirt that read, ''Don’t follow me, I'm lost.'' That’s how everyone in the university seemed to me. Edu­cation, I decided, was not the answer.

I began to think maybe I could find happiness and meaning in prestige. I would find a noble cause, dedicate myself to it, and in the process, be­come well known on campus. The people with the most prestige in the university were the student leaders, who also controlled the purse strings. so I got elected to various student offices. It was a heady experience to know everyone on campus, to make important decisions, to spend the university’s money getting the speakers I wanted and the students, money for throwing parties.

But the thrill of prestige wore off like everything else I had tried. I would wake up on Monday morn­ing, usually with a headache because of the night before, dreading to face another five miserable days. I endured Monday through Friday, living only for the partying nights of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Then on Monday the meaningless cy­cle would begin all over again.

I didn’t let on that my life was meaningless; I was too proud for that. Everyone thought I was the hap­piest man on campus. They never suspected that my happiness was a sham. It depended on my cir­cumstances. If things were going great for me, I felt great. When things were going lousy, I felt lousy. I just didn’t let it show.

I was like a boat out in the ocean, tossed back and forth by the waves. I had no rudder-no direc­tion or control. . But I couldn’t find anyone living any other way. I couldn’t find anyone who could tell me how to live differently. I was frustrated. No, it was worse than that. There’s a strong term that describes the life I was living: hell.

About that time I noticed a small group of peo­ple-eight students and two faculty members­ who seemed different from the others. They seemed to know who they were and where they were going. And they had convictions. It is refresh­ing to find people with convictions, and I like to be around them. I admire people who believe in something and take a stand for it, even if I don’t agree with their beliefs.

It was clear to me that these people had some­thing I didn’t have. They were disgustingly happy. And their happiness didn’t ride up and down with the circumstances of university life; it was con­stant. They appeared to possess an inner source of joy, and I wondered where it came from.

Something else about these people caught my at­tention-their attitudes and actions toward each other. They genuinely loved each other-and not only each other' but the people outside their group as well. And I don’t mean they just talked about love; they got involved in people’s lives' helping them with their needs and problems. It was all to­tally foreign to me' yet I was strongly attracted to it.

Like most people' when I see something I want but don’t have, I start trying to figure out a way to get it. So I decided to make friends with these in­triguing people.

A couple of weeks later I sat around a table in the student union talking to some of the members of this group. The conversation turned to the topic of God. I was pretty skeptical and insecure about this subject' so I put on a big front. I leaned back in my chair, acting as ifI couldn't care less. ''Christianity, ha!'' I blustered. ''That's for unthinking weaklings, not intellectuals. '' of course' under all the bluster I really wanted what these people had, but my pride didn’t want them to know the aching urgency of my need. The subject bothered me, but I couldn’t let go of it. so I turned to one of the students, a good-looking woman (I u..sed to think all Christians were ugly), and I said' ''Tell me, why are you so dif­ferent from all the other students and faculty on this campus? What changed your life?''

without hesitation or embarrassment she looked me straight in the eye, deadly serious, and uttered two words I never expected to hear in an intelli­gent discussion on a university campus: ''Jesus Christ. ''

''Jesus Christ?'' I snapped. ''Oh, don’t give me that kind of garbage. I'm fed up with religion. I'm fed up with the church. I'm fed up with the Bible.''

Immediately she shot back, ''I didn’t say religion. I said Jesus Christ!'' she pointed out something I had never known: Christianity is not a religion. Re­ligion is humans trying to work their way to God through good works. Christianity is God coming to men and women through Jesus Christ.

I wasn’t buying it. Not for a minute. Taken aback by the young woman’s courage and conviction, I apologized for my attitude. ''But I'm sick and tired of religion and religious people, '' I explained. ''I don’t want anything to do with them.''

Then my new friends issued a challenge I couldn’t believe. They challenged me to make a

rigorous, intellectual examination of the claims of Jesus Christ-that he is God’s son; that he inhab­ited a human body and lived among real men and women; that he died on the cross for the sins of hu­manity; that he was buried and was resurrected three days later; and that he is still alive and can change a person’s life even today.

I thought this challenge was a joke. Everyone with any sense knew that Christianity was based on a myth. I thought that only a walking idiot could believe the myth that Christ came back from the dead. I used to wait for Christians to speak out in the classroom so I could tear them up one side and down the other. I thought that if a Christian had a brain cell, it would die of loneliness.

But I accepted my friends, challenge, mostly out of spite to prove them wrong. I was convinced the Christian story would not stand up to evidence. I was a prelaw student, and I knew something about evidence. I would investigate the claims of Christianity thoroughly and come back and knock the props out from under their sham religion.

I decided to start with the Bible. I knew that if I could uncover indisputable evidence that the Bi­ble is an unreliable record, the whole of Christianity would crumble. sure; Christians could show me that their own book said Christ was born of a virgin, that he performed miracles, and that he rose from the dead. But what good was that? If I could show that scripture was historically untrustwor­thy, then I could show that Christianity was a fan­tasy made up by wishful religious dreamers.

I took the challenge seriously. I spent months in research. I even dropped out of school for a time to study in the historically rich libraries of Europe. And I found evidence. Evidence in abundance. Ev­idence I would not have believed had I not seen it with my own eyes. Finally I could come to only one conclusion: If I were to remain intellectually honest, I had to admit that the Old and New Testa­ment documents were the most reliable writings in all of antiquity. And if they were reliable, what

about this man Jesus, whom I had dismissed as a mere carpenter in an out-of-the-way town in a tiny oppressed country, a man who had gotten caught up in His own visions of grandeur?

I had to admit that Jesus Christ was more than a carpenter. He was all he claimed to be.

Not only did my research turn me around intel­lectually, but it also answered the th.ree questions that started me on my quest for happiness and meaning. But as Paul Harvey says' that's the ''rest of the story. '' I will tell you all about that at the end of this book. First' I want to share with you the core of what I learned in my months of research so that you' too' may see that Christianity is not a myth, not the fantasy of wishful dreamers, not a hoax played on the simpleminded. It is rock-solid truth. And I guarantee that when you come to terms with that truth, you will be on the threshold of finding the answers to those three questions: who am I? What is my purpose? What is my destiny?