

Pastor Mel Blackaby – Personal testimony June 15, 2008

I was born a poor Blackaby child. And I mean that literally. When Dad was called into Pioneer Missions he was called, we were drafted. We had no say in the matter. We were along for the ride. And wouldn't you know it, he had five children to divide up what little income that we had, and it was tough. Those early years of growing up, it was interesting to watch as I was watching my father work away as hard as he could trying to plan a church up in Canada.

As little children, we didn't understand all that was going on. And we just knew we didn't have all of the things our friend had. We had to share hockey equipment. Now you don't understand exactly what that means; except when I explain that my older brother had a game before I did, and he wore the equipment, and then we switched on the way to my game, it would have been thoroughly used in every way you can imagine before I put it on. We were poor Blackaby children sharing hockey equipment and everything else, doing all we knew.

And I remember as I grew up, we had a good home. We laughed, we had fun, we didn't really even know we were poor, really, when it came down to it. God protected us and watched over us. And there was a time in my life when I was trying to decide about this faith that I'd been hearing about from my parents- watching at church, hearing about God brings people to salvation, their coming and sharing their testimonies. I remember as I was riding my bicycle – like I said sometime this weekend – that I don't remember knowing a Christian in my grade at school. I remember riding my bicycle with one of my friends, we were down the street, and he asked me a question I'd never been asked before. He said, "If you didn't have to go to church because your dad's a pastor, would you go?" It never crossed my mind. It was never an option for me to ever consider.

All the way through college, I don't think I could've ever considered such a thing. It was just expected, it was what we did. And so, I remember going home that day and considering if I had been born in another home, would I not be a Christian? And I remember pondering that, I was just a young boy, about eight or nine years old, and I remember one moment I just began to think about our home and the homes of my friends. We'd go to my friends' homes and there was always drinking, and smoking, and arguing, and yelling, and cursing and it seemed like my friends always wanted to go to our house because our house was different. And it just seemed as I began to watch and I began to compare, I realized that the only difference between my friends' home and our home is that our home is a Christian home. And I began to recognize that my parents believed in God.

That we went to church every Sunday. Morning and night, and Wednesday night, and every time the door was open we were there at church. And none of my friends went to church. And all of a sudden I began to ask the question what is the difference between all that is going on in my friends' families and our family. I realized that it was that Jesus

was the center of our home. And that was the moment, in a very simple, child-like way, I decided, I want what I see in my home. I want in my life what I've seen in my parents' life. At the age of nine, I gave my life to Jesus Christ in a very simple way because I'd been hearing the gospel story all my life. But somehow it came together and I realized that the story I'd been hearing about Jesus Christ, that it is true because it is real in my own home.

We continued to grow up, I got involved in all kinds of sports, and activities and life became very, very busy. And somewhere along the way, I was having this sense deep in my heart that God might want to use my life. Somehow, I looked at my life, and I couldn't imagine how God can use my life. I was terribly shy. I didn't like crowds. I always had my brothers doing all the talking and I just kind of sat back and listened quietly. I was painfully shy to ever stand in front of a person and say anything. And I thought to myself, how can God use me? I can't even speak. Therefore, I remember just going and just trying to keep it quiet, but somehow sensing deep inside that God wanted to use my life. And as I began to grow and understand increasingly, there was this sense that I knew someday, I was going to follow him, but I just quite wasn't ready. And there came a moment when I began to push that back to the side and just try to live my life.

There were some things I wanted to do. There were some things I wanted to see. And I had some plans of my own that I wanted to go travel, I wanted to see the world, I wanted to experience some of life, and maybe someday I'll come back and I know that I'll try to live my life for God, but I just began to close my ears, and I didn't want to hear it any more.

And so I began to read the Bible. And every time I'd read the Bible, I felt guilty because I knew I wasn't following God like I ought to. I wasn't a bad kid, I wasn't getting into a lot of trouble, I just wasn't pursuing the things that God had before me. And so I would try to turn to obscure passages and lamentations and other places to try to not feel guilty and I'd read about the kings. And no matter where I turned, I felt guilty because the Spirit of God was convicting me I was not following God's plan for my life. And so I decided I needed to get rid of that guilt.

So I closed my Bible and I stopped reading it. Every time I would pray, the relationship wasn't right. I'd feel guilty because I knew that I wasn't listening to the voice of that spirit that was calling me to follow after Him. And so to get rid of the guilt, I stopped praying. I was still active in church, I was still on the outside doing all the things I was supposed to do, but deep inside I was churning and restless and I felt like I was going down a dark hole, I was spiraling down I didn't know how to stop. And I got to the place where my life was becoming increasingly miserable on the inside, though on the outside I learned how to put on a face and be faithful and be active in all kinds of things.

And so there was a moment I was going to go make a bunch of money. I was going to make some money, I wanted to travel, and go to Europe, and a lot of places.

And so I went up north. And I know you think I'm already north. But I went about ten hours north of where I currently live right now. I was way up in the northern part of Canada. I was going to do some logging. Now you can make a lot of money in a hurry as a logger. We were up there. And they do most of the logging in the wintertime. Because in the wintertime, all the lakes freeze over, the rivers freeze over. And you can actually get to places in the winter you can't get to in the summer because there are no roads up there. So the lakes would freeze over and we'd drive across the lakes on these big huge trucks, to get into areas to go and get the big trees.

And so we were out logging, middle of January, it was 30 or 40 below, every single day. And I remember they gave me what looked like garden gloves for me to wear. And I remember thinking; you've got to be kidding me! It's freezing out here so how do you keep warm? They said, "Work hard." So we worked hard. And worked hard every day. And I enjoyed it. It was up in the mountains, it was kind of dangerous work, but I remember even that time, it was my 20th birthday. And on my 20th birthday, I was in a remote area, they were actually still training me on the chainsaws, and at that point, I was on a landing pad where a big tractor would go off into the forest, and they'd chain up the trees they'd cut down. They'd bring them back to the landing pad, I was there to chop the ends off and make sure they were clean. I was the only one on the landing pad that day. It was so cold. In fact it's better to do logging when it's colder than 20 below. Because by the time the trees get back to the landing pad, they're so frozen and brittle, every single branch would just snap off and it wasn't much work. So I'd cut down a tree, had lit a fire, and was trying to stay warm, was trying to stay warm around it.

And I remember that moment, it was my 20th birthday. Nobody knew it was my birthday. I was a long, long ways away from home. I heard wolves howling off in the distance. It was bitterly cold. And there I was all alone, far away from my family, my friends. Nobody there but myself. But what made it even worse is that it was paralleling my walk with God because it just felt like he was a long, long ways away. Well, we went on to a specific contract that we had to slash lines, is what they call it. It's when a seismograph crew cuts a line right through the forest up and over the mountains and just keeps going way in there and they're checking for oil and gas. So we would come in after these big Cats would come through there and we'd cut down any leaning trees and kind of clean up the forest irregularities.

It's a very dangerous kind of job. So we'd gone in there with these big 4 x 4 trucks with chains and we'd climb way off into the mountains. And I'd come up to one particular tree that had been pushed over, and it was a huge tree. The base of it was enormous. And I knew that my chain saw couldn't cut all the way through it. So I went to the front and I began to cut into the log, but I didn't realize the pressure that was in it because some other stuff had been pushed up against it. And when I got about halfway through, the pressure was so great that the log broke. It swung out and it hit me, and it threw me- 15, 20 feet-laying back into a snowdrift. I remember my chain saw was way back

there, my hard hat.... And I remember looking back as I was laying in the snow bank, and my leg, right here, was coming straight back up. And my foot was sitting about right here. And that was my first clue something was wrong. It shattered my femur into a thousand pieces.

And I remember as I lay there, it was as if God was standing beside me, and He audibly spoke. He said, "Mel, if you're not going to be of any use to me on this earth, you have no reason to be here. I could take your life at any time." And right in that moment, I realized God had a purpose for my life. And I was wasting it. And I was wasting His time. All the Grace of God that he had poured into my life with my family and all the things that were around my life, and the opportunity He was giving me, I was all putting it to waste. And in that moment it seemed that my life came clear, and I realized that the things I was pursuing were empty and vain. I said, "Lord, if you would give my life back, I will give it to You."

I remember as we were still off in the forest, I was still messed up. There were only three other guys in this crew. One guy couldn't stand to look at my leg, so he ran off. The other two guys were going to try to help me. At this time, I was a Physical Education major, so I was playing sports, and weight lifting, and running, and swimming. I was twenty years old so I was trying to be big and strong and go in between the trees. And I was curling my chain saw. And I was eating like a horse. So I was maybe about the same weight but was differently proportioned than I am now. But I was heavy and had my coats on and kind of steel-threaded jeans for protection. And these two guys had to, first of all, take my leg and swing it around -yeah, it hurt that much- and lay it on my other leg. Kind of tie it to my other leg for support. Put me in the back of a pickup truck, and then bounce down the mountain for about two-, and- a- half hours. Even talking about it brings back shivers to me, as well. Yet I've never felt such joy. I wanted to sing praise choruses. And the guy who was lying beside me trying to keep me warm in the back of that truck thought I must've been in shock, or gone crazy, or had head trauma, or had something else. Somehow, in my life, I felt free. I felt the joy in the Lord because I knew His presence was there. And I knew He would take care of me. Well, to make a long story short, we found an ambulance, finally, and they took me to the nearest town for a hospital. They couldn't do anything, so they had to fly me to Edmonton for surgery. In those next few months that would come, God began to take away everything in my life.

I guess I'm a slow learner. I was a Phys Ed major. He took away all my sports. At least for the time being. I came back and I'd lost thirty pounds while I was in the hospital on bed rest and trying to get through surgery. Took away my sports. My favorite sport was driving my little sports car. And for reasons I won't explain, the police decided to take my license for a few months. And I lost my favorite sport of driving.

I had a girlfriend at the time that I thought perhaps I would marry. Soon after that we broke up and never did come back together again.

I was making tons of money, and all of a sudden, the money was cut off and I was broke. I got the measles and was laying in the basement of our home just sweating it out, sick,

and my health broke.

So, in other words, my entire identity was taken away. My sports, my fast car, my girlfriend, my money, and my health had all been taken away within about two month's time.

And God began to rebuild my life. And teaching me about basing my life on the foundation of Christ. That He's the foundation that will never be moved. And if I'd build my life on Him, that He would last and my life would be strong, but any other thing could be taken away in an instant.

I want you to know that God speaks, in a still, small voice where He wants to guide your life. But He also has a loud voice. And He loves you enough to use it. And I see the scar on the side of my leg, and it reminds me of the love of God, that saved me from myself and gave me a new chance. And from that moment on, I sought with all my heart to live my life for Him.

And God has been so gracious to us. And God has led us in so many ways and we find ourselves in places we never imagined that we would be. And I won't take time to go through all the things that God has done since that time, except to say that Jesus Christ has become the foundation of my life. In addition, through the influence of Him on me, and being in the home that God put me in, I've come to live my life with a sense of God's perspective. And you'll find as I talk and I share, and as I think, and as I strategize, it tends to be extremely God-centered. Because I know that I have nothing of value in and of myself, apart from Him. My best thinking isn't good enough. It's what He wants to do through me. And I gave Him my life, those many years ago. And it's the best decision I've ever made in my life.

My favorite verse is 2 Corinthians 5: 14 and 15. That is why I serve Him. On my business card I have that little phrase, "Compelled by the love of Christ." That is the story of my life. And as I come to you as a prospective pastor, let me give you the verse, actually I think my father gave to me on the day of my ordination. That has come to characterize what I desire for my life. It is Isaiah 66 verses 1 and 2.

Moreover, my commitment to you is that I will keep God in His place. And seek to hold His word high, and hold it with integrity that what I would share, what I would speak, and how I would live would be based on the word of God as best I know. And I would ask that you as a congregation would pray for me and would pray for Gina, and pray for Christa, and Steven, and Sarah, that we might be a family that honors God in all that we do. We're going to fail, we're going to make mistakes, but with all of our heart, we love Him. And we love God's people. God has been very good to give me opportunities to write books. But I'm not called to be a writer. God has given me opportunities to speak at conferences and teach at seminars and some seminaries.

But I've not been called to be a teacher or a conference speaker. God has put on my heart a love for His people. He's called me to be a pastor. And there are those times when I have opportunities to do those other things on the side, but in my mind those are just kind of side things that God has given me the opportunity to do. I pray that He

would allow me the privilege to continue to serve as a shepherd of His people with all my heart.

And so I count it the greatest privilege in the world to be considered as becoming your shepherd as I seek to follow Christ, the Good Shepherd.