



## April 2017 CHNewsletter

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# THE COMING HOME NETWORK INTERNATIONAL



## Who Is This Man Called Jesus?

By David Shawkan

*So they took away the stone. And Jesus raised his eyes and said, “Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me; but because of the crowd here I have said this, that they may believe that you sent me.” And when he had said this, he cried out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands, and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, “Untie him and let him go.”*  
(John 11:41–44 NABRE)

My name is David, and I am the Lazarus of that Gospel passage. I was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1979 to a Muslim family of nine — six boys and three girls. I was the eighth child.

However, my family was not a happy one. My father was an alcoholic, and my parents fought regularly. From time to time, my father would leave the house, then come back a couple of days later to turn over a new leaf. But it was always the same old story. Finally, when I was about 12, my parents got divorced.

I have almost no memory of my father teaching me right from wrong, giving me advice, or showing me how to do things. My mother did her best to raise us right, but with her huge family, it was never enough. To help with the family’s finances, I started working at age 10, carrying out merchandise to people’s cars at a nearby grocery store. I would also go with one or two of my brothers to sell a bag full of items at a curbside spot known as the “Friday Market.” This was how we put food on the table. As the years advanced, most of my brothers were sent off to

do their mandatory eight-year military service, so I ended up being the flag bearer at home.

*Although I was lonely, I never felt alone. There was always Someone, whose identity I did not know, watching over me.*

I was acquainted with God even when I was small. My family was not godless, but neither were we strictly religious. Most of my understanding about God came from the religious education I received at school, from reading, media, and an occasional visit to mosques and other places of religious significance. Most of my family would pray, fast, offer sacrifices, and give to charity, but not in a regular way.

I was an overweight kid and clumsy. At school, I was always the last one to be picked for sports. (Soccer was my favorite game, if I was allowed to play.) This affected my social skills and friendships; I actually had very few friends. As a result, I put all my effort into study, gaining a top ten in district when I graduated from elementary school. In this way, I became eligible to take a test *Continued on page 2* ➤

Journeys Home

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

to be accepted at the most prestigious middle and high school in the country. I passed the test, and my transformation began.

Throughout the subsequent years, my social grace improved, but I was less religious. When I graduated, I was admitted to the College of Engineering.

My family members moved into adulthood; some married and left home. Our father, of course, was gone. Eventually two of my brothers decided to leave Iraq for Jordan, then go on to Dubai, to escape the increasing government oppression. Nearly the entire family followed, leaving me to finish college alone.

*Although I was lonely, I never felt alone. There was always Someone, whose identity I did not know, watching over me.*

I graduated in 2001 and started getting my passport and papers so I could travel abroad. In the process, I met my soulmate, Emily, who is now my wife. We talked, dated, and got engaged.

Then in late 2002, I traveled to Dubai, where employment was waiting for me with a structural engineering firm. But my heart was not in the work; I had left it back home with my fiancée. When the new year came, war started, and with it, communication ended. I could reach no one back in Iraq.

I spent many hours watching the war news on television and thinking. Then I decided to do a crazy thing: In the middle of this war, I would return to Iraq to be with my fiancée, my friends, and whatever was left of my family. I had this lunatic idea that, with the war, the economy would be better and there would be more opportunity for everyone, especially for those, like me, with outside experience.

The only way back to Iraq was through Syria. So I flew to Syria, then took a minibus going to Baghdad. We passed the border and secondary checkpoints, but by then it was after sunset and night travel was dangerous, so we spent the night there. At sunrise, we

resumed our journey. The road was empty, and it was scary. When we reached Baghdad, I went directly home and joyfully found everyone OK.

In less than a week, the war was over — but the chaos was just beginning. I had brought some money with me, but found no work, so the money dwindled away. In a fatalist mood, Emily and I decided that it would be better just to get married, and whatever happens, happens.

We were married in a civil ceremony. Then we waited a couple of months; she stayed with her parents and I in my family's home, while I rented an apartment, bought furniture and other necessities. We finally began our married life in late 2004, with me still unemployed and a mere \$300 between us.

*Although we were lonely, we never felt alone. There was always Someone, whose identity we did not know, watching over us.*

Our apartment was on Haifa Street, soon to be known as the notorious "Death Street." After the war, many of the apartments on this street were vacant. This attracted the terrorists, where they could move about as if they were normal citizens. There were also many terrorist sympathizers in that area of the city, so that the terrorists acquired weapons and power.

The violence started when a U.S. convoy passed through. Suddenly bombs were detonated and the convoy was ambushed. All the U.S. soldiers were killed, and the terrorists jumped into the vehicles, shouting their slogan.

We ordinary people either left the neighborhood or learned to live with the situation. Our son was born in 2005, and I was employed by a company that served as vendor and supplier to the U.S. troops, government contractors, and other companies, so we stayed. I worked in the Green Zone, the Camps, and in other locations throughout the country. I had business relations with

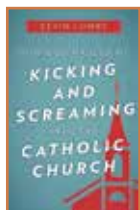
*Continued on page 5* ➤

## FEATURED RESOURCES



### Deep in Scripture CD

In this classic *Deep in Scripture* program, Marcus Grodi with guest Kevin Lowry discuss the Catholic understanding of suffering as well as the meaning and role of Lent in our lives.



### How God Hauled Me Kicking and Screaming Into the Catholic Church — By Kevin Lowry

A preacher's kid at a Catholic university, Kevin Lowry settled into a double major in beer and billiards soon followed by uncomfortable run-ins with pious students, failing grades, increasing anxiety, and the startling realization that some fellow students actually attended Mass the morning after a party instead of sleeping it off.

After getting kicked out from the university, Kevin got his act together, got an MBA, and also got the girl of his dreams. Meanwhile God was working, drawing him to the inevitable conclusion that Catholicism was all true despite his objections. Kevin Lowry's journey to Catholicism is fascinating, often funny, and demonstrates God's unfailing, patient love for all of us.

\$35

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD for a donation of \$35.

\$50

Receive *How God Hauled Me Kicking and Screaming Into the Catholic Church* for a donation of \$50.

\$75

Receive a *Deep in Scripture* CD and *How God Hauled Me Kicking and Screaming Into the Catholic Church* for a \$75 donation.

— THESE PREMIUMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR A LIMITED TIME ONLY —

Obtain premiums by returning the envelope included with your newsletter, calling 740-450-1175, or by going online to [chnetwork.org/premiums](http://chnetwork.org/premiums).

# Why Did the Reformation Happen?

## PART 3: THE RISE OF INDIVIDUALISM

By Kenneth Hensley, Pastoral Care & Resources Consultant



With the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation coming in October of this year, in this series of newsletter articles we've been asking two essential questions: First,

boiled down to its essence, what *was* the Reformation? And then second, *why* did the Reformation happen at that precise moment in the history of Christianity?

In terms of the first question, we've seen that the Reformation was not about the creation of a new religion. Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and the other Reformers never saw themselves as teaching anything other than the Christianity of the Apostles and the early Church.

Nor was the Reformation *merely* about certain Catholic theologians coming to disagree with the Church on certain doctrinal issues, although it seems to have begun this way.

No. At its heart, the Reformation was a reaction against, and ultimately the rejection of, the very idea that Christ had established, and that there existed on earth, a united spiritual authority. It was a rejection of the spiritual authority of the Catholic Church.

### Why did it happen at the time it happened?

There were a number of factors. In Part I we looked at the invention of the printing press and the cultural revolution it brought about in the decades leading up to the Reformation.

Imagine the changes this would naturally bring about in a society. For the first time in history, printed materials became available to the masses. With this came a dramatic increase in the number of people who could read and would naturally want to interact more critically with what they were being taught. With this as well came an explosion of new theological ideas expressed in a myriad of inexpensive pamphlets and books making the case for these new ideas. Finally, with this came a dramatic increase in the number of colleges and universities and theological faculties in which these new ideas could be batted around, debated, and disseminated.

In Part II we looked at the simultaneous rise of a humanist educational philosophy sweeping the universities in the early 16th century. The humanists disliked and even mocked the scholastic theology being done by the great theologians and doctors of the Church at that time (including St. Thomas Aquinas) and called for a return to the "pure" study of Scripture and the Church Fathers.

When you add these factors together, it isn't hard to see how an atmosphere of independence from the authority of the Church might develop. But there's more.

### Individualism in Religion

In 1503, the humanist priest Erasmus published a book titled *Enchiridion*, or *Handbook of the Christian Soldier*. The book emphasized the need for Christians to have a *personal* faith in Christ and to nourish that faith by the *personal* reading of Scripture. It

also promoted the renewal of the Church through a return to the focused study of Scripture and the Fathers.



Guess what? Erasmus' book was an instant runaway hit. It went through 23 editions in its first six years alone. It was being devoured throughout Catholic Europe.

And of course Erasmus was right in insisting that our relationship with Christ ought to be intimate and personal. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that we are called to a "vital and personal relationship with the living and true God" (paragraph 2558). When we talk about putting our trust in the living God, we're talking about the commitment of mind, emotion, and will. Faith *must be* inward and personal.

And as Alister McGrath notes in his excellent biography *A Life of John Calvin*, these ideas were spreading everywhere at the time and weren't in any sense considered "heretical."

In Italy the movement often known as "Catholic evangelicalism" ... with its stress on the question of personal salvation, became firmly established within the church, even penetrating deeply within its hierarchy, without being regarded as in any way heretical (page 7).

In other words, as with the other points we've looked at so far, the new appreciation for the "individual" rising out of the Italian Renaissance had a positive side to it. Just think of the masterpieces of Renaissance art with its focus on the individual, the person. Take a look at the statues of Michelangelo, or the paintings of Raphael, Caravaggio, and Leonardo da Vinci.



### The Rise of Nationalism

Now, this trend toward individualism in the decades leading up to the Reformation didn't express itself merely in an emphasis on religion as something intimate and personal.

The fact is, at the time, throughout Catholic Europe, there was an increasingly strong spirit of resentment felt toward centralized authority of all kinds: the authority of the Church and the authority of the empire as well. With respect to the Church, anticlericalism was rampant. With respect to the empire, nationalism was on the rise.

For instance, in Germany, McGrath tells us:

Intense resentment was felt against the pope. In part, this reflected an incipient German nationalism, marked by a resentment of all things Italian. It also reflected popular irritation at the fact that ecclesiastical revenues (including the proceeds of indulgence sales) were destined for Rome, and the maintenance of the somewhat extravagant lifestyles, building programs and political



adventures of the Renaissance popes ... In many ways, Luther's reforming program made an appeal to (perhaps even to the point of a crude exploitation of) German nationalism and anti-papalism, allowing the Reformation to ride on the crest of a wave of popular anti-papal sentiment (*Calvin*, page 13).

## Conclusion

Read again that last sentence. McGrath, a world-class Protestant theologian, is suggesting that Luther's program of "reform" in many ways exploited an atmosphere of "nationalism and anti-papalism" already in existence at the time. The Reformation was able to "ride on the crest of a wave of popular anti-papal sentiment."

In other words, along with all the other factors we've discussed so far, the very *idea* of centralized authority was being rejected at the time. Individualism in religion was on the rise, and so was the individualism of nations. Christendom was beginning to break apart.

And this is key: it wasn't simply because of all the new ideas in the wind. The resentment that was felt toward the Catholic Church was to a significant degree the fault of the Catholic leadership.

How so? Stay tuned for Part IV in next month's newsletter. ■

## DEEP IN HISTORY CONFERENCE TALKS



The CHNetwork is excited to be making available talks from our past Deep in History conferences on

our website. Be sure to visit [chnetwork.org/deep-in-history/](http://chnetwork.org/deep-in-history/) for the newest releases. We plan to have all the talks available by the end of 2017!

# CHNETWORK SUMMER RETREAT COLUMBUS, OH JUNE 12-15, 2017

Our summer retreat will be held in Columbus, Ohio (just an hour away from our main office and studio!) at the St. Therese Retreat Center of the Diocese of Columbus.

Open to all Catholic converts and journeyers who are members of the CHNetwork, the retreats are a great opportunity to meet (or catch up with) CHNetwork staff and other members, to enter into prayer, attend Mass, reflect on the "journey home" and the call to lifelong conversion to Jesus, and of course to enjoy some good food and fellowship. The costs are \$275/person with a single room, \$425/married couple (room with double bed), or \$200/person if no room is needed.

Visit [CHNetwork.org/retreats](http://CHNetwork.org/retreats) for more information or to RSVP. Please feel free to email [retreats@chnetwork.org](mailto:retreats@chnetwork.org) or call 740-450-1175 with any questions about this or other CHNetwork events.

CHNETWORK SUMMER RETREAT

## WHAT IS THE CHNETWORK?

The **Coming Home Network International** was established to help non-Catholic Christians, clergy and laity, discover the beauty and truth of the Catholic Church.

Through the one-on-one outreach of our pastoral staff and volunteers, our monthly CHNewsletter, regional retreats, social media, and through the online community forums and groups at our website [CHNetwork.org](http://CHNetwork.org), we strive to ensure that each person touched by grace has fellowship and resources for their journey of continual conversion to Jesus Christ.



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The Coming Home  
Network International



[www.chnetwork.org](http://www.chnetwork.org)

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## Our Church

By Deacon Alex Jones

**Last month we paid tribute to two good friends of the CHNetwork who have recently passed from this life, Deacon Alex Jones and Fr. Michael Scanlan.<sup>1</sup> We received permission to reprint a portion of Deacon Jones' book *No Price Too High*<sup>2</sup> in which he beautifully tells of the treasure he found through entering into full communion with the Catholic Church after being a Pentecostal minister. We share the below portion, written from his wife Donna's perspective, as an encouragement and challenge for us all to have as much gratitude and awe towards the Church that Jesus established. (No Price Too High is available for purchase from the Coming Home Network by calling 740-450-1175 or going to [store.chnetwork.org](http://store.chnetwork.org).)**

I picture myself walking through the wilderness of this earth. God is in heaven, but he has not abandoned us. He has placed his Church on this earth to give us all the help we need in order to one day join him in heaven. Hallelujah! When I battle through all the trials I encounter during the week, I know I can come into this Church and can give praise for all he has done for me. I can gain strength and inspiration from Mother Mary and the saints, who were victors even before they went to heaven. I can receive the Word of God through the priest, and I can be filled with inspiration. I can gain inspiration through my brothers and sisters, who build me up through their charisms. That gives me the strength to go out and spread the Good News of the Gospel. We are a spiritual community, and these gifts shouldn't just stay in the church building. We take these charisms—what we have received—out into the community to serve as helpers to one another.

Our strength is derived from the Eucharist—the bread of the Lord's table. Every time I take Communion, I am awed by how the Lord humbles himself to be my food. I can take him into myself, and he is my food. He is our physical and spiritual Manna. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps 46:1). Eating his body and drinking his blood is our strength. That is our present help.

When we receive the Eucharist, it is not just for ourselves alone, but to give to our brothers through our actions.

We are servants of Christ. By nature we are selfish, but the more we are filled with the love of Christ, the more we will desire to be loving and giving persons. Our minds will be centered on heavenly things. When you are revived, you

are concerned with what God is concerned about, and he is concerned about lifting souls out of bondage.

Our Catholic Church is the filling station of life, and we are to have life abundantly! It also equips us with the armor we need to go out into the world—into Satan's territory—and take back our homes and neighborhoods. It is a battle, and we are to be salt wherever God asks us to go.

I now understand that the Catholic Church was the structure Jesus left for us. He didn't hand us a Bible, he left us the Church. When we witness to people about Christianity, we don't just hand them a Bible and say, "God bless you! So long!" We want to give them structure, and we have the good sense to bring them to our church, to a body of believers and a pastor. Do we think, then, that God *didn't* have enough sense to leave the structure of the Church for us? Christ left us the structure of the Catholic Church—a Church that the gates of hell would never prevail against. She has the same basic structure today that she had two thousand years ago. The content of the Christian Bible wasn't determined until nearly four hundred years later, and it was determined by a Council of bishops of—guess what—the Catholic Church!

It makes sense. It is all so logical.

The Catholic Church is in every country, with every color and every nationality. The Spirit will enlighten and lead the faithful into all truth. Those that really want to know the truth must educate themselves concerning the Catholic Church. Many of the things we were taught as Pentecostals about the Catholic Church were erroneous. When I learned the truth about the Catholic Church, I didn't cease being Pentecostal; I simply became a fulfilled Pentecostal. Of course, the process was not easy. It caused the breakup of families. It put mothers against daughters, sisters against sisters, and fathers against sons. That doesn't mean that it wasn't the will of God for us to come into the Church. Jesus told us this would happen (Mt 10:34–39).

To others who are thinking about coming into the Church I would say: Don't be afraid of where God wants you to go. God will reveal where he wants you to go as long as you follow his plan. You may feel lost, hurt, and discouraged, but don't forget, our Lord suffered as he hung on the Cross. He was doing God's will.

God has a plan that is beyond our understanding, and we need to follow him even though we may lose everything. I eventually came to the point where I understood that. I could relate to Job. Naked I came into this world; naked I am leaving. Lord, not my will, but yours be done. I had no idea what was in store for me. I had to give up twenty-five years of working with my husband as a pastor's wife. I had to give up my ministry as well as some of my family and friends. But you can never outdo God's generosity. When

1 In the March 2017 newsletter, Fr. Michael Scanlan's name was incorrectly listed as Scanlon. We sincerely regret the error.

2 Alex Jones, *No Price Too High* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), pp. 244–248. Reprinted with permission.

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you put your total trust in God, even when you feel like you can't make it any further, God will never let you go under. He will send someone to strengthen you. He will send people you would never expect to encourage you. He will strengthen you through the Church, the priest, a homily, his Word, or a song. Some days I would be struggling, and someone would come up and give me a hug or just a smile. Those people didn't know how much they were ministering to me.

As a Catholic, I have also had the opportunity to be a minister to others. About the time we were beginning our journey into the Church, the priest sex scandals began surfacing. We were celebrating our first anniversary as Catholics when Father Dennis Duggan was removed from Saint Suzanne's (his case remains unresolved at this time). Some of the parishioners found out when they heard about it on the evening news and were very upset. It was like a funeral. I was on the parish council then and was able to help some of them through this. They looked to us, the Maranatha group, and realized we had already suffered similar pain with the loss of our church.

There was a great deal of questioning and doubt within the Church at that time, but I never once doubted God's plan in all this. The Holy Spirit helped me to understand that this God who spoke the earth and the heavens into existence is certainly capable of correcting whatever is wrong in his Church. It is Satan's tactics that bring about hopelessness. But Christ's truth brings hope. He shows what is wrong and corrects through prayer.

I believe God is bringing his Church back to its first glory in the days after Pentecost. God will take down those that continue to do evil in his Church. He will raise up priests and leaders after his own Heart. He will use them to bring about knowledge of the power and glory of his Church. The Lord is opening up the doors because he wants to revive his Church. We have not yet seen what the Church will be like in those days. God is gathering everyone with one mind and one goal to be the voice and power of his Church on earth. There is coming a time when God's Church will be totally awesome in the earth, and nothing, nothing will be able to stand against her.

We must not complain about our leaders, but pray for them. We can't give up if things don't happen immediately. We must be persistent in prayer. We are in the greatest Church on earth—Christ's Church. The gates of hell will *never* prevail against the Church, and the Spirit of Christ will be with us *always!*

Now that I am in Christ's Church, I feel as if a table has been spread before me with all the delicious delicacies too numerous to taste. I am experiencing the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8). Meditating on all the incredible goodness God has bestowed on us, this is my prayer: *Lord, thank you for leading Alex and me to your Church. Give us the strength and the will and the mind to be totally immersed in you and your will. Give us the strength to stand in the hard times and the love to overlook whatever faults its members may have. In Jesus name, amen.* ■

## FROM THE HERMITAGE: Apostolate of Reunion

By Br. Rex Anthony Norris | [LittlePortionHermitage.org](http://LittlePortionHermitage.org)



For over two decades the Coming Home Network International has been assisting women and men on their journeys home into full sacramental reunion with Christ and His Church. CHNetwork is an apostolate of reunion.

There are many reasons people begin to explore the Catholic Church: mere curiosity; a search for something more, which they sense is missing from their current denomination or faith tradition; a desire for more goodness, truth, and beauty in their lives. Every good reason for exploring the Church stems from one common source, the work of unmerited grace in a person's heart.

Not everyone who responds to this initial touch of grace enters the Catholic Church. Even when a person gives his or her reasons for turning away from the Church having once explored her, only God knows for certain why, at least for now, the exploration of the Church ended shy of the baptismal font and/or Confirmation and first Eucharist.

In a few short weeks (unless you're reading this piece *after* the Easter Vigil) a rough estimate by this author suggests that

over one hundred thousand people<sup>1</sup> from around the United States will enter the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil. Praised be Jesus Christ!

Their entrance into the Church will come at the end of many months, in some case many years of prayer, study, and reflection, and in some cases wrestling with God about the decision. The vast majority of these men and women will never regret their choice to respond to the touch of the Master's Hand upon their heart.

What a pleasure it has been for me as a partner in this apostolate of reunion to join CHNetwork staff members and volunteers as we have come alongside a number of these men and women as they have made the journey home.

And thank you, dear reader, for coming alongside these individuals in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit through your prayers, your presence on the CHNetwork online community ([community.chnetwork.org/forum/](http://community.chnetwork.org/forum/)), and your support through your financial offerings. Without God's grace working in you, this apostolate of reunion would not be possible. ■

<sup>1</sup> Based on official numbers of people who have entered the Church in the United States each Easter Vigil for the past twenty-plus years.





# Prayer List



## Clergy

- For Sarah, a Southern Baptist lay minister, that she finds faithful brothers and sisters in the Church.
- For Theodore, a non-denominational missionary, that our Lord grant him a hunger for the Holy Eucharist.
- For a United Methodist minister in Georgia, that the Holy Spirit guide him home and comfort him in his recent loss of his wife.
- For a former non-denominational missionary in Texas, that his curiosity about the Catholic Faith would grow by God's grace.
- For Charles, a pastor in Montana, that his conversations with his priest friend would help him hear the call of Jesus to enter His holy, Catholic Church.
- For a Presbyterian missionary in Thailand, that as he searches, reads, and investigates the Catholic Faith our Lord would call him home to His Church.
- For a non-denominational lay minister in Maryland, that she be able to go from being curious about the Catholic Church to Catholic in fact.
- For Peter, a minister in Sweden, that he and his wife may come rejoicing into the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.
- For an Evangelical missionary in Kenya, that through his prayers and study our Lord Jesus would guide him home to full communion with the successor of St. Peter.

- For Aaron, a former Episcopal priest, that all obstacles to entering the Catholic Church be cleared away.
- For Valerie, a former Evangelical Free seminarian, that both she and her husband may soon be able to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.
- For a former pastor of the Evangelical Free Church in South Carolina, that the barriers to him receiving Jesus in the Holy Eucharist be cleared away.

## Lay

- For Becca who is battling depression.
- For all fallen-away Catholics who no longer practice their faith to return to our Lord in the Eucharist.
- For a man who feels like he is called to remain in his Anglican church for now but hopes that his wife will become open to the Catholic Church.
- For Elaine who is looking for answers to some practical questions about her conversion as she approaches the Easter Vigil.
- For Joseph and his wife as they encounter marital discord on account of his impending conversion to the Church.
- For a woman from a non-denominational faith background who is very much drawn to the Church and the Eucharist but can't move forward with her journey right now on account of the division she would cause in her family.
- For Chris who feels like her journey is at a standstill.

- For Jeff who has begun seriously reading and studying about the Catholic Church, that he know how best to continue with his journey.
- For Troy and his family who are entering the Church at Easter, that their witness be an encouragement to others seeking truth.
- For the wife of a minister, that her praying of the Rosary bring her ever closer to Christ and His Church.
- For a Baptist in the West to be able to move beyond reading and listening to Catholic radio to more seriously pursuing her interest in Catholicism.
- For a man who recently met with a local priest who told him that his converting to Catholicism would be too much bother and too time consuming. That he not be too discouraged and be willing to seek the counsel of another priest.
- For Bill who is having difficulties meeting Catholics as he begins attending Mass and pursuing his interest in the Catholic Church.
- For a Presbyterian who is developing a Catholic devotional life and is seeking answers to some concerns about her potential conversion.
- For Paul who became Catholic last Easter but has drifted away from practicing his faith.

In every issue we include timely prayer concerns from the membership. All members are encouraged to pray at least one hour each month before the Blessed Sacrament for the needs, both general and specific, of the CHNetwork and its members and supporters.

Please submit all prayer requests and answers to CHNetwork Prayer List, PO Box 8290, Zanesville, OH 43702 or email prayer requests to [prayers@chnetwork.org](mailto:prayers@chnetwork.org). We use only first names or general descriptions to preserve privacy.

## EWTN'S THE JOURNEY HOME on television & radio, hosted by Marcus Grodi, president of CHNetwork



### TELEVISION

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Tuesdays 1 AM ET, Fridays 1 PM ET  
*The Best of the Journey Home*: Wednesday 1 PM ET

### RADIO

Mondays at 8 PM ET — Encores: Saturdays 7 AM ET, Sundays 1 AM ET and 5 PM ET  
*The Best of the Journey Home*: Monday-Thursday 12 AM ET

**April 3**

Thomas Storck\*  
 Former Atheist & Episcopalian

**April 10**

Jeff Gardner\*  
 Former Mormon & Atheist

**April 17**

Jeff Barefoot\*  
 Former Evangelical Protestant. Re-air from 10/14/13

**April 24**

Fr. Timothy Reid\*  
 Former Methodist

To access the full archive of past Journey Home programs go to [chnetwork.org/journey-home](http://chnetwork.org/journey-home).

\*Schedule is subject to change.



## ...Journeys Home Continued...

► “Journeys Home” continued from page 2

contractors and U.S. Army personnel, especially the Corps of Engineers. In the end, I started my own vendor-supplier company.

My wife, meanwhile, was working as an office manager with one of the American security companies, giving us some financial security.

But we had to keep our employment secret, because the terrorists would kill us as traitors if they knew. Anyone who worked for the Americans or joined the new local army would be on their death list.

I will never forget the day we awoke to see an Iraqi soldier, pieces of his body tied together with a rope, hanging between a light pole and a tree across the street. A cardboard sign stated, “This is the destiny of all traitors.” After that, the U.S. and Iraqi Armies refused to enter that neighborhood. The terrorists had it to themselves. They began to threaten, run out, and kill people of other ethnicities. They controlled access and killed on the spot anyone they decided was a traitor.

When our son Steven was three years old, we got word that the terrorists were out to get us. They must have found out where we worked. It was as if that same Someone who had called Abraham — “Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1 NABRE) — called us; we got our gear together and fled to Dubai.

I found work in downtown Dubai as a civil engineer with a consulting firm, building the tallest building in the world. We had a good income, a great apartment, and everything pertaining to a luxurious life. Our son grew, we had a daughter, and life was stable. But something was missing. There was a longing for meaning, for something or Someone that wasn’t in our lives at that time.

I hadn’t forgotten God, but I wasn’t living for Him and letting Him show me the way. Instead, I was trying to make my own way. This filled me with pride and arrogance. I became judgmental, considering some people beneath me. Now God, in His boundless love, was about to humble me and purge me, visiting upon me an interior captivity and suffering like that which He visited upon the Chosen People when they were in Egypt (see Exodus 2:23–25).

When the recession hit, the construction and real estate market in Dubai collapsed, and many people, including myself, lost their jobs. And if you were a foreigner in that situation, you lost your immigration sponsorship and had to leave the country. The speed with which all this happened left us stunned. I had no plan, little savings, and many financial obligations. We were forced to sell everything we had at a loss, and I left the car at the airport as we left.

But where would we go? We couldn’t go back to Iraq; we would be killed, for sure. So we decided to go to Jordan and apply for a program called SIV (Special Immigration Visa). This was a program for people who had worked for the U.S. government or their contractors and could not return to Iraq because of threats.

So my family flew to Jordan — myself, my wife, and the two children, ages four and one. And in Jordan, God taught us the real meaning of suffering. He humbled me, especially, in preparation of what was to come. Life there was much different than it had been in Dubai: no employment, no income, no resources, no fam-

ily or financial support, high living expenses, and barely enough money to last two or three months. We had gone from luxury to poverty in a plane trip.

The SIV process took much longer than we had money for. Interviews and screening and job hunting seemed to go on and on. Finally, some meager help arrived from both my wife’s family and my own. We still had to live on bread, water, and occasional cheap vegetables. We lived for our children, who were trapped inside the four walls of our living quarters as in a jail.

We had a three-day respite when my family visited us. They took us to the tomb of Jethro and to Mount Nebo, where Moses had stood (see Deuteronomy 34), and we could see the Holy Land far below. I felt a longing for that place, the Holy Land. Everybody claims it — the Jews, the Christians, the Muslims — but it is really for all peoples. In that moment, I felt that God was going to help us. My faith grew stronger, and I began in earnest my return to God.

After several more months of waiting, the International Organization for Immigration (IOM) notified us, saying that we should get ready to leave for the United States, our departure date being within six days. However, four days later, the IOM notified us that the trip was canceled. My passport, which had been issued under the old Iraqi regime in 2002, was no longer valid now that Iraq had a new government. So I needed to acquire a new passport before we could leave. We had been lifted up only to be thrown down again.

Yet somehow, the pain I felt was not rage or anger, but pure suffering. In my poverty, I had grown closer to God, to that Someone who was always with me. And now He helped and supported me through the procedure of completing the documents, receiving my passport, and receiving another departure date. This time, for sure, I had completed my time of slavery in the land of Jordan. God was, in effect, telling me, as He had told Moses (Exodus 3:7–8 NABRE), “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry against their taskmasters, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them up from that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Our exodus brought us finally to the United States of America in May of 2010. We stayed with friends for a few days, then rented a small apartment in Scotch Plains, NJ, where we still live today.

At this point, new challenges began. No one in the family knew English and the culture was different. We looked like strangers and got strange looks on the street. Some people welcomed us with a smile, while others did not like us. The task of adapting to this new life was daunting, and at times we thought of giving up and going back. But I’m not a quitter, so we stayed on.

I found a warehousing job in Freehold, an hour’s commute away: twelve hours a day, six days a week in a huge, windowless warehouse, without heating or cooling, lifting 50 pound boxes onto shelves or pulling them off shelves and stacking them on pallets. I would leave home before dawn and return when the children were going to bed, so I never had any time with them.

## ...Journeys Home Continued...

Finally my body gave out, and I suffered a back injury. I applied for Worker's Compensation, but they said, "You're OK, you can return to work after a short rest." I hired a lawyer and filed a grievance, and in this way finally got proper diagnosis and treatment for my slipped disc and nerve damage. To this day, I am physically limited because of that injury.

Back on the job market, finding employment was difficult. I needed work to support my family. Did that God I had trusted during all this time even exist? I was beginning to wonder.

Yet in the midst of my interior struggle, blinded and lost in a strange land, once again that Someone came to me, removed my blindfold and allowed me to see a glimmer on the other side of the wilderness. Here I was, wandering, searching, looking for answers, and at every turn, that Someone was there: Jesus.

I had encountered Jesus, as a Muslim, in the Qu'ran. In that book, He was not the Son of God, but I had always liked the stories that related to Him, the mystery that surrounded Him. I never realized until here, in America, it dawned on me that He might be the One who was watching over me, guiding me.

I recalled watching a video, where the Pharisees wanted to stone a woman who had committed adultery. To test Him, they asked Jesus about it. He turned to them and said (John 8:7 NABRE), "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." No one had an answer to that. Jesus then told the woman (verse 11): "Go, and from now on do not sin any more." I was astonished by this combination of authority and simplicity, and it inspired me to read the Bible. With such conflict within me, I dared not tell anyone what I was doing, not even my wife. It had to be a solitary journey, just between me and God.

I downloaded a Bible app on my phone; a physical Bible would be a giveaway to what I was doing. I read through Genesis and Exodus, but that wasn't telling me what I needed to know. So I moved to the New Testament, beginning with the Gospel according to Matthew. When I reached chapter five, the Sermon on the Mount, I was amazed. Wow! What is going on? Who is this Person who tells people to love their enemies, to turn the other cheek, and all these other things? What really captured my mind and heart was this:

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8 NABRE)*

It seemed He was talking directly to me, telling me to seek Him and I would find Him.

Then I compared Jesus to everyone else in the Bible and throughout history. Everybody made mistakes and committed sins — except Jesus. That was a milestone, a moment of truth. Who is this sinless man? Where did He get all these tremendous teachings? Where did He derive His authority? The questions multiplied, but along with them, that glimmer of light began to grow within me.

I wrestled with God. What are You doing to me? Is this the path I should follow? I would fall asleep with these thoughts continually going through my head. Then one night, I had a dream. I saw Someone whose face shown like light. I couldn't see the face itself, just the bright light. He held out His hand and said, "Come, do not be afraid." When I awoke, I felt overwhelmed by the glory and was filled with joy and relief. This had to be the One!

Yet I would be lying if I said that I immediately believed in Jesus or submitted to Him. I needed a sign, something I could survey and evaluate. So for the first time in my life, I asked Jesus to provide me proof that He is real and — most importantly — alive.

Soon afterwards, my wife and I were returning from the city with the children. The car was parked at the train station. The weather was humid, and there was a layer of humidity on the car, so that one could doodle on it with his finger. On the windshield, driver's side, there was a fish sign traced, like the ones the early Christians drew to identify themselves one to another. It hadn't been done with a finger, because the moisture would be dripping down if it were. It was just there, perfectly outlined. All of us saw it, but I was the only one who knew what it meant: Jesus had left me a sign. Now I knew that Jesus is alive. He was the One who was always there for me, watching over me in every danger, every misfortune. I had been blind, but He helped me to see.

When we got home, I went straight to the bedroom, closed the door, knelt facing the window, and submitted myself to Jesus. In return, He gave me a comfort and peace that I had never before known. I now believed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and in the Holy Trinity. I believed that Jesus was crucified, resurrected, and alive, that He will come again to rule the righteous in His kingdom.

So now, to be Christian believers, we needed to attend a church. But which Church was the right one? More questions, a never-ending flow!

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## ...Journeys Home Continued...

My family and I decided to study the history of Christianity, to see which Church was the true one. We studied about the disciples, the Apostles, the early Church, the bishops, the centers of power in the ancient and medieval world, the later divisions, basically the whole history. We also visited different churches: Catholic, Protestant, even Orthodox. We met and talked with many people along the way; they provided wonderful support and insight.

Coming from a Muslim background, one point we considered was the Virgin Mary. Back home in Iraq, we had a picture of Mary hanging in one of the rooms. She wore a green scarf. As a small child, I had no understanding of Mary's significance. All I knew was that her pure face filled me with joy whenever I looked at her. My mother occasionally went to a nearby church to light candles. And yes, she had a rosary. She claimed that the Virgin Mary appeared to her in dreams to comfort her when times were difficult, like during the Iran–Iraq war in the eighties, when one of my older brothers was seriously wounded. For a Muslim boy, Mary was routine, but as I think of her now, guarding us with her love, it's overwhelming.

My wife had had the same experience when she was small. She, her sister and mother would sometimes go to a church and light candles to the Virgin, to pray and ask her to be with them in their sorrow — and their prayers were answered.

The Virgin Mary, then, had a special place in our hearts and prayers, even as Muslims.

To research the Bible, we delved into its history, comparing the sacred Scriptures of the early Churches. We discovered that the Catholic and Orthodox Bibles have some books that are not in the Protestant Bibles. Well, those books either had to have been added or removed. So we researched the development of the Canon. It turned out that all the books were in the ancient official list from the Council of Hippo, AD 393. So history affirms that the books were later removed from the Protestant Bibles.

In the process of this research, I had acquired several different versions of the Bible. I asked the Lord to show me the right path. I placed the New American Bible (a Catholic version) under my pillow to sleep on it. That night I had a dream of a huge place with a multitude of people. Everyone was dressed in white. I was holding the Bible in my hand, reading it as if teaching. This confirmed to me that the Catholic Bible was the true one.

Now every faith has its prayers. But for Christians, there is a commandment in Scripture to pray the Lord's Prayer. In Matthew 6:9 (NABRE), Jesus tells His disciples, "This is how you are to pray." He did not make it optional; therefore, it is obligatory. Which churches taught this?

Regarding worship, the foundation is that of establishing and maintaining a harmonious and loving relationship with God. God is superior to man, so man should be in submission to God. Moses was commanded to remove his sandals when God appeared to him in the burning bush. And it is said that the Apostle Peter, when condemned to death by the Romans, asked to be crucified upside down out of humility. Both men respected God in their actions.

From this perspective, our worship — place, time, posture, rituals, prayers, etc. — must reflect our spiritual submission to Jesus. Worship should also strengthen faith and unity within the Church. It must take place between heaven and earth and align our prayers with heaven. These things we found fulfilled in the Catholic Mass. The altar, the incense, the ancient and holy prayers — all this caught our hearts and souls from the first time we attended. We were drawn, through study and attendance, to the Holy Sacrifice, the clean oblation, the offering that hearkens back to the first human being. This was the ultimate sacrifice for all mankind.

We were baptized, confirmed, and received our first communion at Easter 2016. My wife was happier than I had ever seen her. My son is now an altar boy, and my daughter is looking forward to serving God when she is older. We attend Mass daily as a family.

My life has changed for the better. I became a U.S. citizen. I obtained my master's degree and am now working as a business analyst. I have become part of this wonderful community because God has been generous, rewarding me for my steadfastness by answering my prayers. He is just and all His statutes are just. He is the true and only God, in whom I believe and whom I seek to please all the days of my life.

*Throughout my whole life, Jesus was with me, though I knew nothing of Him. He called me out of the land of Mesopotamia, the Nineveh of Tobit and Jonah, the Babylon of Daniel and the exiles, the Ur of Abraham. He led me out of slavery, through an exodus, and into a Promised Land. He humbled me through suffering in preparation for redemption and restoration.*

At the right moment, when I was desperate, alone, abandoned in a dark place, as if I were dead, Jesus was standing there, in the light, calling to me, "David, come out!" Soon I found myself in His welcoming arms, clinging to Him with all my might. ■



DAVID SHAWKAN was born in January 1979 in Baghdad, Iraq. He works as a Senior Business Analyst and lives in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. He holds a BS degree in Civil Engineering and an MS degree in Management of Information Systems. David is married and has two children, a son, 11, and a daughter, 8. They are parishioners of St. Bartholomew the Apostle Catholic Parish in Scotch Plains, New Jersey. David enjoys reading and writing; he is writing a book, *Jesus, The Source and Summit of Us All*.

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