

CHAPTER 1

THE GENESIS OF IT ALL

I WAS BORN AND RAISED in Ghana, West Africa, and I vividly remember the altar my mother had in their bedroom. My father never went to church when we were growing up. He only became a Christian after his retirement. My mother was different. She was very active in her faith, constantly fasting and praying for her family. I remember my oldest brother once complaining about Mom spending so much time in fasting and prayer, but Mom understood something in her spirit that we were not privy to. We would go with her to church, but I definitely had no clue what it meant to be a Christian. I am utterly convinced that Mom's fasting and prayer are what protected and preserved her ten children through the years. I grew up watching an intercessor in the person of my mother. I spent my teenage years in boarding school and only saw my family during our long vacations. Those times were rather brief because I spent most of my vacation time with an uncle in another city. That was my regimen all through my high school and college years.

After college, I spent some time in London with my college roommate, who was also my closest friend. He came from town one day and said he wanted me to meet a good family friend from back home in Ghana. That was my introduction to my future wife. Of course, I did not know it at the time. The first thing she did was to

invite me to church. I was not a Christian and was not particularly interested in church. I knew I was basically a good person and did not think I needed formal religion to live a good and moral life. Somehow I consented though and found myself taking the train every Sunday to join her for church. It was a rather interesting experience for me. The pastor was a former police officer who responded to a call into ministry and ended up planting a church on the outskirts of London. I always looked forward to meeting my new friend, Angela, at the train station and riding with her to the services. I would have my notepad in hand and take copious notes as the pastor preached. I could not relate to the excitement and enthusiasm of the people though; it did not make sense to me. They were a contented group of people who somehow had found peace with God. It was meaningless to me. God could not be that personal, real, or intricately involved in the lives of humans.

After almost every service, I would confront the pastor with my notes and ask why he thought the way he did. Once I said to him that the church's desire to set up a Christian school was not the right thing to do. I said it was simply going to shield the children from experiencing the broader worldview that they were rightly entitled to if they attended regular public schools. I saw Christianity as a way of isolating people from the reality of broader social norms and behavior.

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I had always been a smart student and prided myself on my reasoning abilities. Little did I know that I was in total darkness. I had absolutely no clue of the dangers involved in living without a relationship with one's Creator. Pastor Mike was always kind and gracious. He would invite Angie and me to their home for lunch almost every Sunday since we typically also stayed for the evening service before taking

the long train ride back to the city. Those times together were my opportunity for endless questions and arguments about the teachings of Christianity. I was searching for the truth, and my young mind would not settle until I was convinced Christianity was worth it. I simply could not come to terms with all the time they invested in church and various undertakings in the community. Pastor Mike was never offended by my numerous questions. He must have found my restless mind rather interesting. I also believe they must have been praying for my soul. Strangely enough, Angie was always understanding and never felt embarrassed by my numerous questions and unbelieving stance. She never pressured me into accepting Christ. She simply kept inviting me back to church with her.

One day during a prayer service, I was in a corner of the sanctuary just trying to relate to everything around me. Angie did not attend that service with me as I had decided to go by myself. I had been attending the church for several months but still was unconnected with what was going on spiritually. That night was different. I sat quietly in the sanctuary as everyone prayed. Suddenly, I felt an intimation within me that it was time to give my life to Christ. The urge was persistent and rather irresistible. I simply got up, went to the pastor, and told him exactly what I was feeling. He was very happy for me. I gave my life to Christ and got baptized the next Sunday. Suddenly, it was almost as if scales had fallen from my eyes. I could now relate to what was going on. The darkness had been cleared. Christ had extended His grace to one more lost soul. The kingdom of darkness had become depopulated by one soul, and God's kingdom had been populated by one more child.

I had never read the Bible or owned one. Angie was so excited for me. Her friend had finally surrendered to Christ. She quickly got me a Bible, which I still have in my study. I was excited and devoured the entire Bible in a rather short span of time. I made copious notes as I read.

After reading from Genesis to Revelation, I came back to the front leaflet and wrote these words: "Life without God is a hopeless end; life with God is an endless hope." I had crossed over from the darkness of the enemy's grip into the liberating life of Jesus. I had a newfound freedom and joy. I could now relate to what was happening around me

spiritually. My heart was at rest. I was so grateful. I immediately began processing everything through my newfound Christian worldview.

Shortly after my conversion experience, it was time to leave London and go back home to Ghana. The Lord was not entirely done with me. He had another surprise in store. The church was holding some special services, and I attended every night.

At the last evening service before I was to leave London, the pastor asked the elders to gather around and pray over me. As he began praying, he uttered some rather strange words that I found scary and confusing. I was a new Christian and knew nothing about how the Spirit of God could speak a prophetic word through God's children. The pastor said something to this effect:

Many things are stirring in your heart. Your desire is to change people through the political arena, but God has something different for you. It is not through politics. A seed has been sown in your heart that is yet to germinate. God has a different plan for your life. There is a light that has been lit in you. It will burn brighter and brighter.

He then closed by praying, "Lord, let every seed dry up except the seed of life." I still remember those words today. They were deeply lodged in my spirit. I felt afraid and confused.

Why should every seed in my life dry out except the seed of life? I was particularly stunned by the fact that he seemed to have revealed the deepest longings of my heart. Deep down in my spirit, I yearned to make a difference in society through politics. After my first degree in economics and political science, my plan was to get a law degree and pursue a career in politics. I saw the political arena as the most feasible means of impacting lives and making a difference in society. How could Pastor Mike emphatically say in his prayers that God had a plan for my life that was totally different from my agenda in politics? He and I had not discussed that. I was even more confused now.

Pastor Mike asked the media crew to give me a copy of the tapes

from the service and the prayers he prayed over me. He handed them over to me before the congregation and said, “Albert, take these with you. You would need them someday.” As you can imagine, my curiosity and confusion only intensified. How could this man be so sure of himself about what God had told him about me to the point of giving me a recording of it? God was giving me a future point of reference. The Lord did not want me to forget the genesis of my call. I carried those tapes with me wherever I went and whenever I traveled.

A few years after leaving London, Angie and I met back in the United States and got married.

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Angie and I had been friends for five years. I was the introvert when we met, and she was the extrovert. I had always admired her integrity, strength of character, intellect, outgoing nature, love for God, and sheer strength to endure adversity. Angie is a gifted administrator and planner. She has an uncommon knack of executing the most complex activities with class and excellence. She researches everything until she comes up with the best solution. Her organizational skills are par excellence.

I could not have been blessed with a greater gift of a wife. I am the visionary, and she is the manager of the family. Our skill sets complement each other. We love each other dearly, and our children know that. I often tease her that I was her divine reward for inviting me to church to give my life to Christ.

We felt blessed and happy. I was working and pursuing an MBA degree. She was working in malaria research. We had a beautiful, new home. We were deeply involved in a newly planted church (one-year-old when we began attending) that worshipped in a school facility. I served as an elder and board member of the church, and Angie was in charge of Sunday school. Angie was already attending that church when we got married, and we were the first couple to be married there. Our wedding was performed in the school cafeteria. I remember my conversation with the pastor as Angie and I were getting ready to

drive off for our honeymoon. I said to him, “We will do God’s work with our entire being.” Those words turned out to be rather prophetic. We labored vigorously to help establish the church. We worked with the youth ministry, which kept us both very busy. Being in a school, there was always a lot of work to do in terms of setting up for services. I vividly remember carrying our personal television set from home to church every Sunday to set it up for the youth. We used our house for all kinds of youth activities since the church had no place to meet outside of the school.

In our personal lives, we felt very blessed as well. Marrying a friend made our relationship especially close. She knew my likes and dislikes, and we had done various things together as friends before I asked her to marry me. We were financially blessed. Life was simply good. We enjoyed traveling and vacationing. We could go wherever we wanted and do whatever we wanted. We had no children then. We could go and come as we pleased. We were great friends and loved each other dearly. We still do after three decades of marriage!

A few years after getting married, I began to feel a stirring that God was calling me into full-time ministry. I could not shake the thought from my spirit. I kept it away from Angie for a while because I was not sure how she would react to the news. I also remembered those old tapes from years back in London. I looked for them and listened to the message. It was true. Those prophetic words were coming to pass. All I could think of was doing what pleased God, but how was I going to break the news to Angie? How was she going to take it? What would the implications be for our lives and marriage?

Finally, I mustered enough courage to tell her. I had it all figured out. I would take her out to dinner and break the good news to her that the Lord was calling me into full-time ministry. Somehow, I felt confident that she would rejoice that God had called me to serve Him in ministry. I quite remember the evening when I informed her. We both enjoy Mexican food, so I took her to a nice Mexican restaurant to break the good but scary news to her. Angie was most unamused. She immediately registered her opposition. She made it clear that she did not sign up to marry a pastor. She was worried about the financial