

FAITH JOURNEY

Jerry McDonald

My journey to saving faith in Jesus Christ has been a long and winding road. I grew up in a moderately dysfunctional, musically talented non-Christian home. I always believed there was a 'god' but I didn't know He was more than a nebulous entity disinterested in the daily events of my life. I did not come to faith through any signature moment of epiphany, nor did my life ever hit 'rock bottom.' I became a believer through hindsight which was skillfully delivered by God through the wisdom of a few key people that came into my life when He knew I was ready.

I left Minnesota in 1985 to study music at Indiana University. I met Anita (my future wife) a few days before school started and we began dating. I was introduced to her family and realized they were all very close and cared deeply for each other. This was very different from my background and my first real glimpse of Christ's love in action. Through a series of what I thought were unfortunate events, I had to leave school in 1987. This is when the twists and turns began which eventually took us to Cincinnati, Ohio.

While in Cincinnati we became friends with Amy and Gary Kindell. In 1991 I joined the Air Force and left Cincinnati but kept in contact with Amy and Gary. While I was in the military, Gary attended the first Promise Keepers event in Colorado. The summer we returned to Minnesota (1994) Gary called me and said "You have to go to this...it's coming to Minneapolis, we'll come up and I'll buy your ticket."

Even though there were over 50,000 men in the Metrodome that August weekend, the speakers were talking directly to me. They weren't preaching anything I hadn't heard from a pulpit over the last few years, but it became personal. God loves me, He cares for me, He will never forsake me, and He has a plan for me. Throughout the weekend it became very clear that the seemingly random events of my life were not a series of cosmic accidents.

When I had to leave school I was devastated, but He didn't send me to Indiana to get an education - I was there to find my life partner. When we moved to Cincinnati I thought it was just another stop in the winding journey, but He wanted us to meet Amy and Gary: strong Christians with big enough hearts to come to Minnesota and take me to Promise Keepers. When Anita and I found out we could not have children, He was not taking a family away from us; He already had two children picked out especially for us (Elijah and Nikki).

I have a great life and God has shown me that I AM BLESSED, and He is at work in my life today. When I was younger I thought the ability to make music was a talent delivered by a lucky stroke of DNA. God has shown me that it is a gift straight from His hand, and he is giving me the opportunity to finish my education that I had started in Indiana twenty years ago. I don't know where the winding road will ultimately lead, but hindsight has shown that God was in control before I was a believer and as I became a believer. So if I have learned anything it's: "For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" Jeremiah 29:11.



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Roots of Easter

Eric Twietmeyer



As I approached this Easter season, I was curious about the roots of Easter. What kind of a name is Easter anyway? I checked out and found three strands of history for the celebration we call Easter.

1) Hebrew

About 3500 years ago, a Hebrew shepherd named Moses was commissioned by God to lead the enslaved Israelite people out of Egypt. God convinced a stubborn Pharaoh to let the slaves go worship in the desert only after He slaughtered the first born sons of Egypt. The Israelites were protected from the slaughter by smearing lambs' blood over their doorframes. Thus, the "Passover" feast was established for Jewish believers and is still celebrated. This year, Passover falls on a Wednesday night.

2) Pagan

Anglo-Saxon religion celebrated a goddess named Eostre who was tied to the ideas of the growing light of spring and natural renewal and rebirth. Ironically, the name of this goddess probably goes back to some of the names of gods that Israelites worshiped during periods of apostasy (1 Sam. 7:3-4, 1 Kings 11:33). When Christianity came to Anglo-Saxon people, it was natural to tie into the pre-Christian pagan festival name.

3) Christian

About 2000 years ago, during the Passover season, a man, Jesus, who claimed to be God, was killed by religious and political authorities and was miraculously raised to life after three days. Jesus' death ultimately fulfilled what the Passover lamb represented, forgiveness and sparing of human life, despite sin. The early church began to gather weekly on the first day of the week (Sundays) to celebrate the discovery of Jesus' resurrection. No specific command is given to celebrate the resurrection annually, but the case could be made from scripture. "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival..." (1 Cor. 5:7-8). Christians tied into the Hebrew custom, but with a hope that reached to people of all nations.



Disturbed? Confused? Angered? Do you just want to go around saying "Happy Resurrection day?" Christian culture has, in many ways, redefined Easter so its pagan roots are non-emphasized. Having lived in Minneapolis for almost four years now, I know that all three of these strands of Easter have eager followers. Interestingly enough, the term used for Easter in many other languages is much closer to the word for Passover in Hebrew (Pesah), avoiding the pagan roots.

As a follower of Christ, I have no interest in trading a relationship with a Risen Savior Creator for a false god of renewed creation. It just seems like a bad idea, like trading gold for pond scum. I am impressed (and relieved) to experience His creation as He renews it this spring, but know that He will last far longer than His creation (2 Pet. 3:13). Do I propose a name change? Probably not. Rather than whine about what Easter doesn't represent for the Christian, I'd just as soon enjoy all the truth of the renewal and life that Christ has for us. I'd rather find a Jewish friend and celebrate the picture they have of deliverance. I'd rather dialogue with a Pagan friend about renewed life, what they believe, and then share my hope. May God bring you new life this Easter season.

Sources: Webber, Robert. *Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship*, 2004.