

# Faith, Family & Football

Tim McGonagle



**“You call yourself a Christian yet.....”**

Our family went to the Methodist Church in Syracuse, Kansas and when we moved to Scott City, Kansas my family continued to go to the Methodist Church. Every Sunday we were in town we would be at the local church. One thing we did do maybe a little different was anytime there was a revival going on in Scott City our family would go. I went forward at a revival service at the Scott City Middle School one night when my heart was strangely warmed; I was about 13 years old. The Holy Spirit was calling me to go down front.

One night we were at a revival at the Assembly of God church. It was our family's first trip to the Assembly services. During the service an older woman jumped up beside me and started speaking in tongues. That for sure got my attention and I have always wondered what she was saying?

When we first moved to Scott City we lived right across the street from the Lutheran Church. Our good neighbors next door were Lutherans and when it came time for Summer Vacation Bible School our folks told us kids to just go with the Brueggeman kids to Bible School so they would not have to leave work to take us to the Methodist Church which was on the other side of town. Vacation Bible School was every morning for a week back in those days. Pauline Strickert and Leona Numrich were just like football coaches when it came time to memorizing scripture verses. They would stand up in front of all us kids and we had to repeat those scripture verses over and over and over. Perfect practice makes perfect you know. The memories of going to the Lutheran Church every summer as a kid are remembered fondly.

During my 6<sup>th</sup> grade year I joined the Methodist Church by going to confirmation classes every Wednesday night after school for a month or so. We had a bunch of kids joining the church and we all walked together after school to the church which was only a couple of blocks away. I got into quite an argument with our Pastor Evans though. I wanted to be baptized again. Pastor Evans said I had been baptized as a baby so I was good to go. I told him I didn't have a clue as a baby and this time around I was making a choice and I wanted baptized. We went round and round and round constantly for weeks until he finally relented because I just would not give up.

Eventually I graduated from high school and went off to Colby Community College and then to Kansas State University. Unfortunately, quite a bit of the time at college I acted like Galatians Chapter 5 verses 19-21. But during my time at college if any of my friends asked if anyone wanted to go to church with them I always said yes. While in college I went to Catholic Mass, the Presbyterian Church, the Bible Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, and the Mennonite Church and to some non-

denominational churches. When college was over I returned to Scott City and started attending the Methodist Church again.

Now one of my passions is reading books. The public library in Scott City is open until 8:00 p.m. twice a week and you could always find me there at least once a week back when I first returned home from college. When my work day was over I would hustle over to the library, on those days the library stayed open late, and started nosing my way around the stacks of books looking for something good to read. But after checking out several books a week for three years I felt like I had read everything that interested me in the library.

Then one night late in 1982, I just could not find any book that interested me. I remember it like it was yesterday. I saw a Bible on the book shelf and thought to myself, "Wow they even have the Bible in here." The next thing that happened was this voice spoke to me in my head and it said, "You call yourself a Christian yet you've never read my book." Immediately I said out loud, "Yeah that's because your book is boring." The voice said again, "You call yourself a Christian yet you've never read my book."

Now I was embarrassed. It suddenly occurred to me, after the voice spoke to me the second time, that the Holy Spirit had just spoke to me for the first time in my life and I had just told God the Father the creator of heaven and earth his book was boring. So I left the library with no books and went home to think about what just happened to me.

Well over the next several days that question just kept running around in my head over and over again. I could not quit thinking about it. So I got out all the Bibles I had in my house and started thinking about where they each had come from and why I had not read the Bible all the way through from Genesis to Revelations.

The first Bible I ever had was given to me around the age of three in 1958. The Bible had belonged to my Uncle Gerald McGonagle. Uncle Gerald had come home from college to Syracuse, Kansas one summer weekend because one of his good friends was going to get married on Saturday. Friday night they were having his friend's bachelor party and three of the guys got in a car and headed over to Holly, Colorado, the bachelor, the best man and my Uncle Gerald. When they got over to Holly some local guys did not like the idea that some Syracuse guys were in town and they wanted to fight. Both cars were racing around town and eventually the Syracuse car left Holly going north on the highway at over 100 miles an hour. Not to far north of Holly is a very wicked curve that goes around a sink hole. The Syracuse car did not slow down and the car rolled many times as it missed the curve with all three young men being thrown from the car and killed. Sometime after the funeral my Grandmother gave me Uncle Gerald's Bible.

Up until I was fifteen years old that was the only Bible I had. It was an old King James Version Bible. When I read from that Bible as a kid I would open it up with my eyes closed and point to a place on a page and open my eyes and read some scripture. I would ask God to speak to me from that scripture. Sometimes I was lucky and hit

something good and sometimes I would hit something I didn't have any idea what it was saying to me.

My next Bible was really just a New Testament Bible I had received at the Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp at Estes Park, Colorado. The year I turned fifteen, Everett Blackburn had approached me one day late in the school year and asked me if I wanted to go to FCA camp at Estes Park that summer. He was trying to get a car load of guys to go. Now Everett was only sixteen but he wanted to go to the camp and he wanted five other guys to go with him so we could split the gas bill. So I told him sure I would go and we had a great time for one week that summer. I never did read the whole FCA New Testament Bible but did read parts of it because it was easy to read and understand.

My next two Bibles I had with me were Gideon New Testament pocket Bibles that were given to me when I enrolled for college at both Colby Community College and K-State. Neither Bible had been used much at all.

Now I never told anyone that the Holy Spirit had spoke to me because for one I was embarrassed that I had never read the Bible because I assumed most everybody going to church had probably already read it. I did not tell my parents about the conversation with the Holy Spirit either but I did talk to my mother about a Bible I did not receive at one point of time in my life.

We moved to Scott City in my 4<sup>th</sup> grade year late in the school year. Before I got to Scott City the Methodist Church gave Bibles to all the 4<sup>th</sup> graders. This is a program the church still does today. But I missed that day because we did not live here yet. I told my mother that story one day because I was thinking about Bibles in my life and it just came out. Well a couple of weeks later on Christmas Day when I opened my present from my parents it was a Bible. It was a Revised Standard Version Bible.

That night when I was by myself in my bedroom with that new Bible in my hand I had a conversation again with our gracious heavenly Father. In my prayer I started by telling God that with this new Bible I was going to read it. I didn't know where to begin though? That was when the Holy Spirit spoke to me again by saying, "Tim, begin with the book of Proverbs for you will see yourself in the Bible."

First of all he called me Tim. God knew my name. Second of all I was not going to disappoint our heavenly Father. I promised him that I would read one chapter a night no matter what. No matter if I was late getting home or was not at home or was sick that Bible would be with me everywhere I went. That is exactly what happened over the next several years. I carried that Bible everywhere I went including to church every Sunday. If the Pastor was boring (there is that word again) I was reading my Bible. When I left town I had that Bible with me and before I would go to sleep at night I was reading my chapter.

Funny thing is I very rarely read one chapter a night, most of the time the book was so good I would read for hours. The first time I read through the Bible I just read it as fast as I could. It was fascinating to me. I had started with Proverbs, but then I went

back to Genesis and went all the way through to Revelations. When I got done I decided that this was the best book I had ever read in my entire life and I started over at Genesis and read all the way through again. The second time through I was constantly finding stuff that had not made an impression on me the first time.

So the question is why was the Bible not boring to me this time around? First of all in the library that night it was quiet. Psalms 46:10 says, "Be still (quiet) and know that I am God." To hear the Holy Spirit speak, you must be quiet. Secondly you must have a relationship with God. I was going to church but was not growing my relationship with our heavenly father. I was comfortable where I was but he wanted me to grow. He was knocking at my door and I decided to open the door a little wider to allow him in a little further.

I am convinced we can read the Bible intellectually but not really know what it is saying. The Bible is a spiritual book and you must have a relationship with Christ first to really understand the mystery of the Bible. Once you have that relationship with Christ and ask God to open your eyes then you can see and understand. The only way to describe it is just like the song '*Amazing Grace*' the verse that says, "I once was blind but now I see."

Now the next thing you need to understand is that I am no Saint. The forces of good and evil are constantly battling in my life. The war is in our hearts and minds. Do you do the works of the flesh or do you have the fruits of the spirit? I see myself as a sinner that is unworthy of what Christ did for me on the cross. That thought alone keeps me humble and when I am humble then I am available to God to be just like a hunk of clay that he then is able to shape and work with and turn into something he wants.

Are you a Christian and believe that Jesus was the Messiah? Do you believe in God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit? Have you ever read the Bible from Genesis to Revelations? Do you have a relationship with Jesus and have conversations with him in quiet places so you can hear him speak to you? Do you find the Bible boring? Well maybe just maybe the following comment was meant for you too, "You call yourself a Christian yet you've never read my book."

2 Timothy 3 vs16-17

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.