

## **Christian Testimony I: Early years, Faith, and learning discipleship**

I grew up in an agnostic home. We were an Army family and moved frequently. In my formative years, I never remember my parents talking about God or attending church. Morals were reinforced, and my family was loving. Yet God was absent. Then, in two short years (between age 9-11), I witnessed my younger sister, then my mother, and finally my father each profess a faith in Jesus as God. More importantly, I saw them change—especially my father. We began attending church, where I heard the gospel, understood it, but did not accept it.

Then, life happened. At age 13, while living in South Korea, I had a very difficult 7<sup>th</sup> grade experience. Thankfully, my parents walked with me through that time with faithfulness, patience, and kindness. In the summer between my 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade year—alone in bed one night, staring at the dark ceiling—I professed to God that I believed He was Lord and Savior. At first, I told no one, but at the end of the summer, I told my mother. I remember her great joy—her response was deeply affirming.

Through my teenage years, my faith grew largely through focused Bible studies. At each military chapel, young adults took us beyond youth group to study the Bible more deeply. I began to read what it said, and I came to understand that being a Christian meant not only believing in Jesus but following Him. Luke 9:23 stood out: Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.

In college, at West Point, several upper-classmen reached out to me and invited me to a campus ministry called the Navigators, an interdenominational group focused on discipling Christians to faithfully and genuinely live out their faith and help others do the same. Through that group, I met and fell in love with Christy Cassidy, a cadet classmate and sister in Christ. We were married just a few days after graduation. We were both committed to knowing Christ and making Him known—the Navigator's mission and a key element of the great commission in Matthew 28.

As a young couple, Christy and I worshipped and found fellowship in Army chapels and with a ministry called Officer Christian Fellowship. The ministry's combination of pastors, priests, and lay people as a faithful group of people committed to each other both greatly encouraged and helped us as a young married couple as well as young Army officers finding our footing in a new and challenging profession. We really saw the "body of Christ" at work in "real life" on our own, apart from our families or the "bubble" of the collegiate environment. It was also at this point that Christy's commitment to the church—a strong part of her story—really shaped my thinking and attitudes that had never really formed in my years in transient Army chapels.