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Born in South Lambeth, attended Westminster City School and read history and theology at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. After serving with the Army in Germany he became Head of Religious Instruction at Battersea Grammar School 1954-57. At present minister of Lansdowne Evangelical Free Church, West Norwood. President of the Fellowship of Independant of Evangelical Churches 1965-66. Well known as an author and contributor to Christian journals.

To make a contribution to this book poses something of a problem. I cannot describe my call to preach without continually using the first person pronoun, and this could give a false impression. I know, in fact, that the initiative in my call to the ministry was clearly not with me, but with God. It has been a reassuring and encouraging exercise, however, to consider my call, as I have never before had to describe the details so carefully.

A sense of call to the ministry of the Word has been mine ever since I was converted, so far as I can remember. To be accurate, of course, the call goes back much further than that. That which God declared to Jeremiah applies to a degree to every man called of God to preach.

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations*
(Jeremiah 1:5, R.S.V.)

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I have no doubt whatsoever that my call goes back beyond my birth. On the human level the odds were against any such possibility.

Perhaps I had better explain how the odds were against my ever being called into the ministry. My parents, at the time of my childhood and youth, were neither professing Christians nor church-goers. I can never remember being in church as a child with my parents. My father was a most dutiful son, as my mother was a most dutiful daughter. Every Sunday we used to visit my grandmother who lived in Surrey, whereas we lived in south London. These visits were as regular as clockwork until the time that she was killed by a direct hit through enemy action in the early years of the war.

On account of belonging to the Cubs, I had a slender connection with a local High Anglican church, and, after my grandmother's death, for a short period at least, I used to attend the church Sunday School. My recollections of this period are few. I can remember an elderly and rather thin female Sunday School teacher teaching us. I recollect being somewhat awed by elaborate processions around the church when the Cubs attended for church parade. The impression still in my mind is of a rather dull and dismal atmosphere, tinged with the smell of incense!

When I was about thirteen years of age, some school friends persuaded me to go with them one Sunday afternoon to a Bible class at Lansdowne Evangelical Free Church, West Norwood, a walk of about fifteen minutes from my home. In a matter of weeks my friends had stopped attending but I continued. I joined the boys' Bible class led by Mr. W. J. Gant. While the whole period is only vaguely recollected, I recall the warmth of handshake which Mr. Gant extended and the interest he showed. When, around this time, we were bombed out through a "doodle-bug",

Mr. Gant was one of the first to call round to see us—a significant memory still.

For the first time in my life—so far as I know—I heard at Lansdowne the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ taught and preached, and applied to my life personally. Three things stand out about that period, although I cannot date them exactly. The Bible class used to meet in what had been the elders' vestry before the main church building had been destroyed by incendiaries. Small missionary books used to be given as attendance rewards—I am not sure whether it was for a month's or a quarter's consecutive attendance. I remember hurrying home with a fervent desire to read these books. They made a deep impression on me—a proof no doubt of the value of "take-home" Sunday School literature.

The second thing that stands out is that we spent a few Sundays in the Bible class when we each had an opportunity to make a contribution. We were encouraged to speak on a passage or verse of Scripture. I remember preparing to speak on Rev. 2:10:

*"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer:
behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison,
that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation
ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will
give thee a crown of life."*

Again, the details are lost in the dim light of the past, but those words moved me and caught my imagination. The thrill and excitement of reading what I had prepared remains, and the memory of one of the older boys in the class saying something to the effect, "You'll be a preacher one day!" Was that the first awareness of a call to the ministry? I do not know. Going out on a Saturday, I remember listening carefully to a conversation some of the older fellows were having with Mr. Gant as to why he had

not entered the ministry, and what was involved in so doing.

Around this time I must have shown signs of interest and "awakening" in ways I did not realize. Coming out of church on a Sunday evening—in fact, out of the church hall where we met during the years the main church building was out of use as a consequence of enemy action—the minister's wife, Mrs. F. A. Hart, said to me, quite out of the blue, "Derek, are you a Christian yet?" "Yes," I replied, and for the first time I confessed with my lips my new-found faith.

As I look back to those days at the end of the last war, and the period immediately following, I cannot separate my sense of desire for the ministry of the Word from the time of my conversion. The talk on Rev. 2:10 was some kind of turning-point. In June 1946, at the age of fifteen, I was baptised and received into church membership.

When it comes to my spiritual indebtedness under God to men for my call and entry into the ministry, I can never measure how much I owe to my Bible class leader, although others too—particularly the two pastors under whose ministries I richly profited, the Revs. F. A. Hart, and T. H. Bendor-Samuel, together with a Christian business man who had fulfilled several pastorates, Mr. H. G. Goddard—played an important part in the outworking of God's will in my early life.

My feelings after the ministry began to grow. Each Sunday afternoon some of the young people used to have tea together at the church. Out of this arose Sunday afternoon open-air meetings in the West Norwood High Street. Furthermore, after the evening service the young people used to meet for prayer. During this period young people in the church was comparatively few owing to evacuation and young men of eighteen being conscripted. The opportunities for speaking were many, and my joy in seizing them was tremendous.

One incident sticks in my mind. The Young People's Fellowship had a "do-it-yourself" evening, and it came to my turn to give the talk. If I remember rightly, I spoke from the gospel of John, chapter 19, verses 23, 24, where John describes the soldiers gambling at the foot of the cross for Jesus' tunic. My theme was the indifference we can show to the cross of Christ. At the conclusion of the meeting, the pastor, the Rev. F. A. Hart, put his hand on my shoulder, commended me for what I had said, and expressed some thoughts concerning my entering the ministry. Probably these words of encouragement meant more to me than he realized. By this time, in my own mind at least, "the die was cast".

I must have mentioned my leanings towards the ministry at home because I remember my parents' opposition to the suggestion, and then sharing their reaction with my headmaster, Mr. J. C. Dent, of Westminster City School. My parents' unhappiness was understandable. They did not know what was happening to me! My father was in the furniture hire business for films, theatres and exhibitions, and from my earliest memory I wanted to have something to do with the stage or films. With this end in view, prior to going to Westminster City School, I spent a year at St. Martin's School of Art in Charing Cross Road, thinking in terms of art direction in films. My desire for this kind of career just fell away. This circumstance was not the most alarming aspect of the situation for my parents. As my father's interest and position in his business grew—he became one of three directors—there was the thought present, although not strongly expressed, that I should enter the business, and make good the advantages gained by my father. The prospect attracted me, and I had dreams of how it could be improved and handled to give me lots of free time for Christian service! But the call to the ministry was

stronger, and opposition to it served only to increase its intensity.

I cannot remember to what degree I shared my convictions with others. My headmaster's reaction was encouraging. He told me to stick to what I wanted to do no matter what others said, and that he was sure that my parents would come round to see it in the end. Meanwhile, he suggested, I should try to keep quiet about it! His advice was good, and his prophecies proved to be accurate. My parents, in fact, could not have helped me more in the end, and I am for ever in their debt.

The main encouragement to the development of my sense of call came from my Bible class leader. He gave me many books to help me, and when he presented me with a copy of Strong's Concordance, I valued it as a symbol of his thought, unspoken, that I would need such in the future. Perhaps the most helpful thing he did was to encourage me to preach. He did a considerable amount of local preaching, and he frequently invited me to go along with him. At first, I read the Scriptures. Then later on I gave testimony to my faith in the Lord Jesus. This was followed by giving a brief talk prior to his sermon. Eventually I was invited to preach and conduct services on my own. I bought a book of Spurgeon's outlines from Foyles, and made one of them on Isaiah 53 my own!

Who can measure the value of encouragement, and the confidence which others place in you? In thinking of all that I received, I have been compelled to ask myself whether I am showing the same encouragement and confidence in the young men who have grown up around me.

On the occasion that I first preached and conducted a service—I believe it was at Coulsdon in Surrey—the clock stopped soon after I began my sermon. Being engrossed in all that I had to present I did not look at the clock. But when I was drawing near to the end of my material, I

glanced up at the clock. A look of horror must have appeared on my face, imagining as I did that I had not lasted out five minutes, for the voice of the elderly church secretary interrupted my final words, "It's all right, the clock has stopped!"

I would imagine that my sense of call was witnessed at this time by the books I began to buy. Foyles' religious book department, and in particular the secondhand section, became a favourite haunt. Spurgeon's sermons were purchased and F. B. Meyer's book on Expository Preaching. "How exciting to be able to expound like that" was the thought I recall coming to me.

The desire to preach and teach the Word of God was strong. My own church had no need of new Sunday School teachers at the time, and I began to teach on Sunday afternoons at a brethren assembly in Crystal Palace. Fortunately for me, although unfortunately for them, they were very short of staff, and all kinds of opportunities came of speaking to the whole Sunday School and leading its activities on occasions, besides the task of teaching a class.

The call to the ministry cannot be divorced from the circumstances in a man's life in which he feels constrained to do something about meeting the need of those who are not effectively reached with the good news of the gospel. At the end of my seventeenth year, and the beginning of my eighteenth, I became engaged in three evangelistic enterprises which strengthened my desire to enter the ministry. A family moved into a temporary estate of pre-fabricated buildings in Addington. The husband was the brother of the young lady with whom I was friendly—who is now my wife! The estate was about five miles away, and soon after the family had moved in, we visited them. We discovered that there was no Sunday School on the estate to which the children could go, and in particular the little girl of the family, who is now my niece. We looked round the estate

and found that the ideal building for a meeting place was the new school which had been built on the edge of the estate. An interview with the headmaster led to an application to the local authority who were pleased to grant permission. On reflection, it seems a remarkable thing that they were willing to do this for such a young upstart!

On the Saturday beforehand we fixed a loudspeaker to my father's car, and toured the estate informing all and sundry of the arrangements, followed up by a reminder immediately prior to the meeting time on the Sunday afternoon. The numbers exceeded all our expectations. We gained workers and helpers from the churches around, but in particular, in the beginning, from the young people of our own church. The work has continued to this day, with the formation of a company of believers in a church fellowship. When I went into the army in January, 1950, we were able to hand over the work to Christians who lived much nearer than we did.

At the same time we had an opportunity of taking meetings and services in a Council Welfare Home very close to where we lived. To begin with the Home was more in the nature of a Remand Home. It then changed in character and became a Home for children who needed care, either temporarily or more permanently, because of family problems. The memory of the early Sunday evenings there is of rowdy interruptions and of problems which drove us to prayer. These meetings continued with profit until the character of the Home changed yet again.

Not unnaturally, practically all of my opportunities of teaching were of children in these early days. With the help of the girl who became my wife I built up a large range of visual aids, and in particular flannel-graph figures—so much so that I use them still today! One Sunday afternoon we walked up to Streatham Common after Sunday School and were amazed to find so many children

there with the parents—children who had clearly not been to Sunday School. The main attraction was the paddling pool. Within thirty yards of the paddling pool was a large enclosure with a stage, which was used by visiting bands and theatrical units. “Why not have a children’s meeting in the ‘band-stand’ on a Sunday afternoon?” was the automatic question we asked. Correspondence was entered into with the Parks Department of the London County Council, as it then was, and permission was granted freely, providing we did not represent just one church but several. Having preached in several local churches, and in particular the Central Hill Baptist Church, Upper Norwood, there was no difficulty in finding those who would support our application.

It is no exaggeration to say that we were able to pack the band-stand, and all around the fence dozens of parents would stand. The great challenge was to clear the pond of children and transfer them to the band-stand! To do this effectively, we used to take off our shoes and socks, and enter the pond to invite each child individually. The flannel-graph visual aid was tremendously helpful in fixing attention, and throughout the summer months this activity would continue week by week. We used to travel on from Sunday School at the Addington estate to the meeting at Streatham Common during the final period. This activity also continued when I was conscripted, and it encouraged others to do the same in other localities.

I’m always grateful to God that my own local church gave me such encouragement. The progress of events was reported to the church prayer meeting and everyone’s prayers enlisted. I gather that the minister described me as a lively colt—and probably with justice! When the results of my higher schools examinations came through, I had to think in terms of what I hoped to do by way of training when I came out of the army. The minister mentioned above,

the Rev. F. A. Hart, gave me sound advice. "Get the best training you can," he said. "It will never be wasted." This advice encouraged me to think of going to university. Cambridge attracted me, and the name "Emmanuel" in particular because of its significance, a fact which seemed to weigh favourably in my interview with the Senior Tutor, Mr. E. Welbourne, who later became Master, for he said with his usual dry humour, "Well, that would have pleased the founders of the college anyway!" The interview is unforgettable. On the train I had carefully read Butterfield's *Christianity and History* in preparation for an interview in which I was applying for a place in history. One of the first things I was asked, not unnaturally, was what I wanted to do after Cambridge. The ministry being my answer, the next question was which ministry. I then explained that I came from an independent evangelical church, which was Baptist in its practice. History went to the winds, and an interview which I anticipated lasting for thirty minutes at the most went on for two-and-a-half-hours, during which time I gave a heated defence on believer's baptism! Clearly Mr. Welbourne's purpose was to make me open up, and this end he most effectively accomplished! I remember sharing with him in some way my feelings after the ministry, and the misgivings my parents felt at that time. He encouraged me to persevere. At the end of the interview he said, "I'm not in the position to give you a place. But if I did offer you a place now, would you accept it?" The implication was such that I did not make further applications elsewhere, and a few weeks after joining the army the confirmation of my place came through.

From the spiritual point of view the eighteen months or so that I spent in the army were some of the most rewarding and profitable of all my life. During the early months I was compelled to stand on my own feet spiritually, and my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was immeasurably

strengthened as a result. After basic training in Winchester with the King's Royal Rifles, I was assigned to the Royal Army Educational Corps, and following training in Bodmin and Beaconsfield was posted to Germany. I had the good fortune to be attached to a famous Scottish regiment, the Royal Scots Greys, in Lüneberg. The experience this period gave of men and of life in general opened my eyes further to see the need men have of the gospel. A group of six of us used to meet for fellowship and service. Perhaps because I had become a Christian first, they looked to me for a measure of leadership. Once again, I was given opportunities for preaching, and we ran a garrison Sunday School. Furthermore, I was given the opportunity of teaching men of different ages, and varying levels of education—an invaluable experience which I did not fully appreciate at the time. The kindness with which I was surrounded is expressed perhaps in the fact that when I left the Pipe-Major of the Greys piped me off at the station, much to the amazement of the occupants of the train, and the local residents.

Cambridge was a great contrast to National Service, and an equally rewarding and profitable time spiritually. A young man with his eyes on the ministry loves contact with preachers. As the secretary of the first John Scott Mission to Cambridge, and then as secretary of the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union, my opportunities for meeting pastors and preachers whose ministries were well-proven were many. The Christian Union at that time supplied local preachers to the many village churches and chapels around, and I was glad to have a share in this activity. Having read history for two years for the first part of the historical tripos, I transferred to Theology for my last year, reading the Part Ia Tripos. At the beginning of my last year I seriously contemplated entering the Anglican ministry, and applying to Ridley Hall. Most of my friends in the Christian Union were Anglicans, and some put quite considerable

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pressure upon me to this end. Not surprisingly, my former Bible Class leader, Mr. Gant, heard of this, and this possibility was mentioned one vacation to a visiting preacher who was in Mr. Gant's home for the Sunday, Mr. H. G. Goddard, whom I mentioned earlier. As a consequence I was invited to tea, and thereafter a friendship grew up which has continued throughout the years. He prompted me to think things through, and I knew that I could not accept infant baptism. All thoughts of the Anglican ministry disappeared.

During my last term at Cambridge, I wrote to the elders of the church at Lansdowne and asked for their considered judgment concerning my suitability for the ministry, and any convictions that they had concerning my future service for God. The answer came in due course that they were assured that God had specific service for me to do, probably in the ministry, and perhaps with particular regard to children. The latter remark did not encourage me too much at the time, as I was thinking in terms of pastoral ministry. But then, I realized, all of my activity at Lansdowne had been among children, and, of course, I loved it. In 1952 I had started a Summer School for children, which God had greatly prospered, and it continues annually up to this time. I little appreciated at the time how much this conviction of the elders concerning my call was going to mean later on.

I am sure that such a letter of request to the elders was right. There is a twofold call to the ministry: that which God gives to the individual's mind and conscience by the Holy Spirit; and that which comes through the local church of which he is a member. Today, if such a letter came to the Lansdowne elders, they would share the matter with the church, and express their conviction to the church, to see if the church had the same mind, and then the individual would be informed.

After degree day, I was faced with the prospect of an uncertain few months. A man is called to an independent evangelical church after preaching—perhaps two or three times—in a church which is without a pastor. A considerable amount of time elapses before these opportunities can take place. Furthermore, the individual's desire to enter the ministry has to be made known, and from the human point of view, one is dependent upon introductions. It was at this point that Mr. H. G. Goddard, in particular, was so helpful. He had tremendous confidence in me, for he recommended my name to everyone possible, and a constant flow of preaching engagements followed. Living at home, I determined that I should earn my keep by teaching immediately the new school term began. After a couple of weeks at a tough secondary modern school in Tooting, providentially, I am sure, an invitation came to teach at Battersea Grammar School, quite near to my home. The Religious Instruction master was in hospital, and I was promised a job for a term at least. This arrangement suited me very well as I had determined that if no call to a church came by the end of the year I would settle down into school teaching for the time being. During that term the second history master gained promotion, and I was offered his post. No sooner had I fulfilled this post for a term than the Religious Instruction post became vacant through the death of the man for whom I had originally deputed. For nearly three years, therefore, I was Head of the Religious Instruction department—an invaluable training ground and preparation for the ministry.

Throughout this period I was preaching every Sunday and at many mid-week services. During my second term at Battersea Grammar School an invitation was extended to me to the pastorate of Walworth Road Baptist Church. I had just a few weeks previously committed myself to the religious instruction post, and I knew that the timing was

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not right yet for me to enter the ministry. But the invitation was an encouragement from God to keep the prospect before me.

After I had been at Battersea Grammar School for two years, the church at Lansdowne became pastor-less. The church building had been restored after war-damage, and its vastness presented a challenge to the congregation that had been used to meeting in the church hall. We had relatively few men at this time, and few young families. After about a year, I was asked if I would allow my name to go before the church with a view to the eldership, at the elders' nomination. This transpired much to my surprise, insofar as each of the elders was old enough to be my father! A happy year followed although there were frequent disappointments so far as seeking a pastor was concerned. During this period I was asked to preach on many occasions at Lansdowne, and to take my share in conducting prayer meetings and Bible studies. Without my being aware of the fact, the other elders had discussed together the possibility of my being called to the pastorate. One Monday evening I sat next to one of the elders at the prayer meeting. At its conclusion, he quietly said to me, "Derek, would you consider a call to the pastorate at Lansdowne? The elders have had it much upon their hearts." My wife and I were in little doubt from the beginning that the answer had to be in the affirmative. While we had not thought in terms of Lansdowne, the church in which we had both been converted, the prospect of the ministry had always been in our minds.

We lived in Upper Norwood at the time, and I can remember the night of the church meeting at which the mind of the church was to be discovered. We stayed at home so that the discussion should be unhampered by our presence. In the late evening, our neighbours must have been surprised to see half-a-dozen men of serious intent file up our garden-

path, only to leave in the same fashion a quarter-of-an-hour later! They had come with the invitation of the church to the pastorate! On October 12th, 1957 I was ordained to the Christian ministry at a service conducted by the late Rev. E. J. Poole-Connor, a former assistant pastor of the church.

There were those who said that it would never work out successfully being called to the church in which I had grown up, and my wife also. This factor has never been a disadvantage, but, in the goodness of God, a great gain. At the time of the induction I discovered that a godly old lady whom I knew well, and who, in fact, died before the induction, had made a long-distance telephone call to my former pastor, Mr. Hart, telling him that she was convinced that God was calling me to the pastorate at Lansdowne, and what could he do about it. His answer, wisely, was that he could do nothing, as any suggestion on his part might be considered out of place. But God's will came to pass in His good time. The past ten years have been the happiest of my life.

Looking back, I realize that the call known immediately after my conversion was from the Lord Himself. At different stages in my development the remembrance of that call gave me direction and purpose. Every period brought its own rich experience. The army gave me contact with men and with life in the raw too, so invaluable for a minister of the gospel. Much of pastoral ministry is teaching, and more than three years' experience as a school-master, in addition to army teaching, has been a tremendous help over the years. A year as an elder gave me insight into the conduct of spiritual business and the heart of a church's life. Moreover, I am aware that the experience I had of leadership and of administration in the Christian Union at Cambridge had much to do with the manner in which I approached the early years of my ministry.

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To a young man, desiring to enter the ministry, I would say: Wait God's time. Regard no kind of experience which comes your way as unimportant, for it may all be part of God's pattern for your future. Seize every opportunity of service, no matter how humble or ordinary. Do God's will today, and you may be sure of His will being done for you tomorrow.