

## Tom Kendrick's Spiritual Journey



Tom has served as an Elder since 2004, is from Harrison and grew up in First Christian Church. Tom and wife Rhonda live in Okeana and have two children, Megan and David. He is a member of the Professional Golfer's Association of America (PGA) and has worked for the PGA as a Career Services and Employment Consultant since 2000. Prior to that Tom worked for the Hamilton Country Park District as a golf professional at Miami Whitewater Golf Course and then Golf Manager overseeing their 7 public golf courses. His interests include golf, Formula 1 auto racing, computers, watching sports and listening to music. He has served in various ministries including Life Group leader and coach, ALPHA team, Servant Heart, Adopt-A-Block, Matthew 25, Upward, Capital Campaign Team, Kids Own Worship, Vacation Bible School and Emmaus Team. Favorite Scripture: Psalms 34:17-20.

"My son, I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

These are the final lines of a favorite poem, "Footprints in the Sand". These words sum up what I finally realized about what God had done for me, but it took me over 50 years to fully realize that!

I grew up and was baptized in First Christian Church, active as a youth and teen with numerous opportunities to begin and build a strong relationship with God. Then a busy life as a young adult didn't seem to leave too much room for God; a life that included college, work, the beginning of a career plus an early marriage that failed. My first marriage challenged my wife and me with many things including her cancer (she is a survivor!), the death of our infant daughter and eventually a divorce.

But shortly afterwards a wonderful woman came into my life, our relationship grew and we were married in First Christian Church. Rhonda and I were having a great time, but still we had little time for God. Then came the birth of our kids, Mark and Megan, and my priorities began to change. Life was "good"; church was there, we were quite active in many ways, but God really wasn't alive in my life; I still didn't have that all-important relationship!

Then on July 13, 1986 my world came crashing down. My son Mark, age seven, died in a freak accident playing baseball at home. I remember praying for Mark and I couldn't believe God would let Mark or me down. How could He let Mark die? I felt lost, angry and literally ran away from God for 15 years and I can remember asking the question: "Why didn't God save him?"

Rhonda and I both drifted through the next 15 years, not realizing clearly at the time how God was comforting us. We grieved in a similar manner, so we supported each other and our marriage stayed strong. As a strong family we supported each other through it all, never wavering or failing to be there when needed. And friends supported us faithfully through many tough times, being there and knowing they could not do or say anything to help, but they were there—and that meant SO much! And most of those were friends God gave us through First Christian Church.

Finally, on a Saturday evening in March 2001, while attending an ALPHA course, God became "real" to me. He had been supporting me and "wooing" me all those years without my even knowing it. I had done nothing to deserve His forgiveness and grace—if anything I deserved the opposite. There was no reason He should accept me back, but He did. How could I ever repay Him for being that single set of footprints in the sand, for carrying me through that tough time in my life, for being there when I didn't know or deserve it?

From then on, Christ became alive and real to me. We continued in a Life Group after ALPHA, an awesome time of learning and growth that I see now was so important.

Another significant event was my Walk To Emmaus, the best three days anyone can spend to fully realize the depth and breadth of God's love. Gradually, I took steps into ministry opportunities that God put before me, learning slowly that my faith and Christianity has no bounds. It certainly is not just a Sunday morning experience, it is a lifestyle, it is my life, it is who I am!

Finally, I saw that God did answer my prayer to save Mark, He did answer the question that troubled me for years: "Why didn't God save him?" God saved Mark just like He saved me when He sent His son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross.

Since then my "good" life has become GREAT and I work on building my relationship with God every day, walking with Him in everything I do. Seeking opportunities to share Him with others, finding ways to serve others and be His hands, His feet and His face. There is nothing more important I can do with my life. I am not sure where this journey will take me but I am glad I am with Him.