

INTERVIEW WITH SCOTT McOWEN

DISCOVERING YOUR CALL

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

What attracted you to ministry to the sick?

SCOTT

Oh, I wouldn't call it an attraction, but it was kind of a calling. I read Bob Buford's book *Halftime* and when I made a list of all the things that I had experienced that were significant, an internship jumped out I had working as a chaplain in a hospital when I was in seminary 30 years ago. I felt that I wanted to help people, and I figured I didn't have the brain power to be a medical doctor and that trip kind of called me to go back and become a chaplain.

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

So, just briefly in the 30 years that you were not involved in hospital ministry, what did you do?

SCOTT

The reason for even going to seminary and being involved in ministry was I felt called to Young Life, but I was not good at raising my own funds. I learned how to make money, but I didn't know how to ask for it. And, so our family had been in the service station business and petroleum business, and I got involved in that and spent my time in the business.

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

You spent 30 years getting to where you could afford to do what your passion was?

SCOTT

Right. I also learned in “that” 30 years that I was called to the ministry there in the work place. We had a number of employees die in that period of time. One committed suicide that I was very close to, and I found that there was nobody ministering to the work place. And, so when I got into the hospital chaplaincy, I learned real quickly that I'm not made out to be in bureaucracy. I've always been an entrepreneur, not a big organization person, so I was directed by a mentor to look at becoming a chaplain to people in business.

And, that's been my calling.

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Is that mainly one on one?

SCOTT

Yeah, mainly one on one or groups I've organized. I've ended up with a number of widowers. And, people ask me--particularly with some that I have weekly meetings with-- “Why do you do it?” My answer is that if I was in that situation I wish somebody would take time to do it for me and I could find nobody else who was doing it. The typical professional organized chaplaincy program is to go out and win souls in big organizations. Women are drawn to the church, but these men are sitting at home watching television mourning their retirement. There are a lot of men like that; there are a lot of people like that.

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

What, formal training have you gone through and how long did it take?

SCOTT

Back 30 years ago, I spent four years in seminary and then I later spent two years in Clinical Pastoral Education training. They call it four units, six months is one unit, and I then worked at three different hospitals in Southern California for six months each

SHOW UP

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

What did they tell you in terms of when you go to visit a patient to always do?

SCOTT

What I learned in the formal education and by doing it, the most important thing is to show up. There is a lot of anxiety walking into a hospital room. It's very intimate; somebody's lying in their bed. Also, you're probably going to find many cases when you're a chaplain that you're kind of labeled "the grim reaper" 'cause when somebody sees your title chaplain they figure somebody died. I have had a number of cases where it was hard for me to explain to them, "No you're okay. I'm just here to help communicate between you and the doctor."

Show up and then listen and shut up. People when they get anxious start talking; you go into a hospital room to visit somebody and you start talking and that person really wants somebody to listen to them. You want to be a tool for our Lord. You want to get your ego out of the way and that's a big, big part of the problem. I had one classmate who was planning on winning souls on their death bed. And, our supervisor asked, "You have to do it?" And she said, "Absolutely." She was trained in her church that she had to close the deal. She felt during her whole Christian life that was her calling. He said, "You mean you can't let the Lord work through you?" It was a class of only five of us. You could hear a pin drop. But, she never got it. It takes a lot more work to just listen to God and the patient and not have an agenda.

PREPARE

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Can you tell us a little more about the training?

SCOTT

The training is doing a lot of verbatim case studies and then presenting it to your classmates and your supervisor and seeing how many times you interrupt a person or you're stepping in the way--and you really want to get out of the way. The other issue is you're dealing with all faiths and people of no faith. And, you never know it when you first go into the room. I feel the Lord is calling us to be there with the person.

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Is it emotionally difficult?

SCOTT

People ask all the time, doesn't it get depressing? Yes, it's hard, my biggest problem is dealing with children with bad situations, but it's very meaningful because a lot of people kind of run away from it. I think--to come back to showing up--being completely present with the person and letting the Lord work through you, letting them communicate is the important thing. Then with my type of ministry there is usually follow-up. A lot of times in the hospital setting, there's very little follow up. Due to the HIPPA laws and so forth, they leave the hospital, they're done. What I have done the last few years is meet them on a more consistent basis over a period of time and you never know where it's going to go. (Laugh)

LEARNING THE ART OF LISTENING, SENSITIVITY & TIMING

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Okay, what are the things you never want to do?

SCOTT

You know there are some little rules that you learn when you go into a hospital room you never want to wake the patient because they're there to be healed. But, when you go to someone's home you usually want to wake them up. In a hospital room you're probably only five minutes with them depending on the severity of their condition. At home you probably spend twenty minutes or in a rehab situation. The thing that you really want to do is get on their level and hear what's going on in their life. You don't want to try to direct the situation.

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Can you give us an example?

SCOTT

An example would be you go in, somebody just lost a leg and you say, "Oh, don't worry about it; they make real good prosthetics now days." You know, you don't want to tell somebody how they should feel or be. You don't want to give people advice unless they ask for it, and it's very tempting to do. I don't know if you've ever seen the old black and white movie where two steam railroad engines are going and.....they just run into each other and the steam goes up. When you've lived as long as some of us have, you see accidents are going to happen. You want to say, "Stop, stop." So, you give them advice Don't do it. You do it with your children...and your parents. But if they don't ask for it, and you give them advice it's just going to backfire.

WHY THE *PSALMS OF COMFORT* MINISTER HEALING

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Do you believe a soothing reading of The Psalms with music has some potential in a hospital setting?

SCOTT

Absolutely, when you think there's 24 hours in a day, and I'm thinking of specific case right now. In fact, I'm going to visit him right after I leave here. He had a hip replacement, roughly 70 years old, mentally he's sharp. His wife died a year ago. He has five kids, one lives locally; she feels all the pressure. She has two young kids of herself. She's a teacher, so she tries to visit him in this rehab center.

So, he's laying there he has about 30 minutes to an hour of physical therapy once a day. He lies in bed, and he has daytime television to watch. A lot of people in the hospital setting don't read that much. It depends on how well they can see. They're tired, they're medicated, and they are just laying there getting bored.

Sometimes you like to see them bored because then that motivates them to get out. I don't know how many millions of people as we're speaking who are lying around in hospital and rehab centers all over the country. Particularly now with all the Baby Boomers, so I see a huge demand for meaningful material, and I would certainly say The Psalms are meaningful material.

EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

What, what do you think about Pastor Chuck Smith's voice versus somebody else's?

SCOTT

I think it's very soothing. I think it's very good. The rehab center where I'm going, I even talked to some of the staff and asked, "Do you really have to have the bells go off so loud? This poor fellow is sitting there or laying there and the bells are going off every 30 seconds, 24 hours a day: announcements, a bell going off, a voice saying 'room so and so needs something' and then the trays going by. So you do need...tranquility. A sound, sound can transform the space. There's a huge need.

What I've heard of Chuck's voice, it's also forceful. I think maybe that's one reason for his success over the years is his preaching style. He pronounces his words and you understand it. And, and I, I'm kind of thinking out loud right now I didn't realize how important that is, but when somebody's talking and you don't understand them, it's frustrating. And, if someone is listening, and you want what they're listening to be forceful enough to cut through the noise, and yet tranquil enough to bring peace. Because even though you're laying there and you're bored you're also probably in pain or something and you need something strong enough to get your attention. It can't just be weak. It has to be direct, I think strong and direct.