

## Episode 34. "Tom's Story."

Tuesday, July 19, 2022. 46 Minutes Long.

*The story of "Major Tom," a pilot in Vietnam. He flew combat for two years and earned 29 medals – while the average pilot only lasted for 16 minutes. This is the story of how Tom survived, and returned to Vietnam as a missionary to people he once tried to kill.*

### John (00:12):

John Shields opens the episode by saying:

### John (00:12):

Well, "Hello!" to all of our friends out in Podcast Land. It's great to be back with you. This is Episode 34 of our biweekly series of the "Saving Christianity" podcast – the podcast that seeks a return to the peace, the healing, and the hope that the Early Christians, when Christianity was founded, experienced. We're coming to you from Christian Family Online, and bringing you a new episode every-other-Tuesday. I'm your host, John Shields. I'm here in the studio with our co-host, Owen Allen, our producer, Shannon Wolfe, and today a very special *guest*. Now, we apologize because we haven't recorded a new episode in several weeks. But probably like your life, we've been traveling, had vacations, and other obligations.

### John (01:04):

But we are back together today. And we are excited to be back. Also, we've had requests for some *personal interviews* of Christians we know who are trying to live what we call "The Early Christian Lifestyle." And we have such a person in the studio with us today, a dear friend to us, that's seated here with us. So the title of this episode is, "Tom's Story." And unless I'm sadly mistaken, you're really going to enjoy this episode. So let's bring in our co-host, Owen Allen. And after that, let's introduce our very special guest. Welcome to Episode 34, Owen!

### Owen (01:53):

Well, thank you, John! And boy, it's good (chuckles) to be back, as you said. A hearty welcome to all of our loyal followers worldwide. I hope you'll forgive us for being off for a couple or three weeks. It's wonderful to be back, especially after travel. But let's get to the point, John. I'm really excited about starting some *interviews* with people we know who are trying to live like the Early Christians lived. And I'm excited that we've got a dear friend here today. In fact, a lot of us call him "Major Tom." (Laughter) And the reason for that will become clear in a few moments. But for my part, welcome to the show, Tom!

### John (02:37):

Yes, Tom. We're glad to have you here today in the studio with us. We welcome you here today. And as Owen said, we want to jump right in. Tom, you and I have known each other long enough, and you've heard me say this many times: That one of the things that I love to do is, when I meet people, is to say to them, "Do you have a few minutes just to tell me Your Story?" And what's interesting about that is *everybody has a story*. Now, the people and the places and the different things happen in all of our lives. Nevertheless, we all have a *story*. And so, I know that the *military* has been a huge piece of your life story. And why don't you introduce us today? Kind of get us into that story, of what God was doing even before you knew He was doing it in your life.

**Tom (03:35):**

Well, thank you for having me here, John and Owen. I really appreciate this opportunity. You're right. The military has been a big part of my life. And I guess one of the things that I would say is people think I'm "old" – but I don't claim that. (Chuckles.) But I was born during World War II. So that's significant because I had uncles who flew in World War II. And then I had another uncle in the Korean War. So I kind of grew up with the military around me. And as a little boy, I dreamed of being a *military pilot* someday. But realizing that I would never have that opportunity ... *I thought*.

**Tom (04:24):**

So kind of to get right into it, in the town I grew up in, were steel mills. And it was expected we all would go to work in the mills after graduating from high school. And that's what happened to me. And I spent two years working in the steel mills, and realized there had to be something *better* in life. So I enlisted in the military. And soon found myself a young buck Sergeant in the infantry with a war heating up in a place called *Vietnam*. And so I expected I was going there and be a "point man" in a platoon somewhere. And along came an opportunity to go to Officer's Candidate School. And then after that, an opportunity to go to Flight School.

**Tom (05:11):**

And I found my childhood dream a reality. The Lord had worked it out where I became a *helicopter pilot*." And ended up doing that for two years in Vietnam. That's kind of the highlights of how my military career started. And it's been fascinating for over 20 years after that, the way things worked into my life, even though I did not know the Lord at that time.

**Owen (05:40):**

Well Tom, let me break in a second. That is so interesting. Tell me this. Were you raised in a Christian home, or have any Christian influence at all?

**Tom (05:52):**

I was not raised in a Christian home. I truly wish I had been, to have those influences in my life. My mother and father were both very good to me. But they did not open up the realities of

a relationship with God. I got some inklings of it over the years. But dominantly, I was raised in a Catholic community and a Catholic background, which really didn't open my eyes up to who Christ was and all that He would do in a person's life.

**John (06:28):**

Tom, something that I think is interesting that our listeners may not know. I know I didn't know it until you told me. And I don't think you knew it (chuckles) at the time: Of the *mortality rate* of a helicopter pilot in Vietnam.

**Tom (06:44):**

Well, this will scare people. But the life expectancy of a helicopter pilot in Vietnam was *16 minutes*.

**Owen (06:54):**

Wow!

**Tom (06:56):**

Not hours, days, or weeks. Minutes. And ...

**Owen (07:01):**

Huh! Hey, that's our first miracle: That you're here at all!

**John (07:04):**

Exactly.

**Tom (07:05):**

Yes, it is. We lost approximately 2,200 helicopter pilots in the Vietnam War.

**Owen (07:10):**

Mercy!

**John (07:13):**

And yet, *here* you sit.

**Tom (07:15):**

Yes.

**John (07:15):**

Yes. Yeah.

**Owen (07:17):**

Well, and the funny thing is, if I understand it correctly, Tom. You actually didn't become a Christian until after all of these things that happened in Vietnam. Is that true?

**Tom (07:29):**

That's absolutely true. I flew combat missions for two years in Vietnam. And I was back home about 14 months when I came to know the Savior.

**Owen (07:42):**

Well, but listen to this, Tom. The old saying, "There are no atheists in the foxholes." I would assume (laughter) there were none as *helicopter pilots* too. Did you see ... were any of the pilots Christians? And did you ever think about religion as you flew into combat?

**Tom (08:00):**

Quite honestly, no. We spent 14 to 16 hours a day in the cockpit, seven days a week.

**Owen (08:09):**

Oh, my.

**Tom (08:10):**

And so you really didn't have a lot of time – particularly in my unit. Because we flew what we called "single ship missions." One aircraft launched out to do an assigned job. And you were on your own, whenever you got in trouble or not. So we didn't build that camaraderie to really know each other that well.

**Owen (08:36):**

And the old theory used to be anyway, "Don't get close to your buddies, because it hurts too much when they don't come home."

**John (08:44):**

Yeah, exactly.

**Owen (08:44):**

That's what we were always taught.

**Tom (08:47):**

That's true. I can remember having to clean out those "hooch" (hut) areas of guys that didn't make it. You would come back after a long day of flying, and your commander would say, "Go clean out so-and-so's things. Pack them up to send them home." (Inaudible.)

**John (09:07):**

Extremely sobering. So Tom, in the midst of all of that, you come home. You're still in the military and an *event* happened in your life that eventually would lead you to Christ.

**Tom (09:26):**

Yes, John. That's exactly right. To quickly background that: I was highly decorated in Vietnam. I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism, three Bronze Stars, multitudes other decorations. I was actually decorated 29 times during the war. And so I was kind of looked at as a "cream of the crop young officer." And when I came back, I was given one of the best assignments a young captain could be given.

**Tom (10:02):**

And on the outside, everything looked great. But on the inside, I was coming apart. Just the hole inside of me – I used to tell people big enough to fly one of those helicopters through. But a young soldier in my unit, he *saw* something. And he walked up to me one day, and he pulled out one of those little military pocket Testaments (a small Bible). And he popped me in the chest with it and said, "Sir, you need this." Now he was a young enlisted man, and I was his commanding officer. And we both broke regulations. He by approaching me that way, and me by inviting him over to my home a couple nights later, where he and another fellow came and we poured through the Scriptures for the first time in my life.

**John (10:50):**

Wow. So that's a miracle, how God used this young man to really start the conversation about Salvation. And it really ... it became a supernatural event.

**Tom (11:09):**

It really did. I had never opened a Bible before in my life. (Chuckles.) I had no idea what to expect. But as we went through the Scriptures, we came to Isaiah 57:20-21. And it says:

**"But the wicked are like the tossing sea, whose waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked."**

And I believe that was the *first* miracle I saw. Because I looked down on that page, and I saw *my* name – literally saw *my* name – over that verse.

**John (11:49):**

Wow!

**Tom (11:49):**

And, uh ...

**Owen (11:50):**

Hallelujah!

**Tom (11:52):**

... and as I was being led to Christ, something else very interesting happened. The individual – there was two men there – the individual speaking stopped me. I was ready to ask Christ into my life. And he said, "I've never done this before. But I have to tell you, if you make this decision, it's going to cost you your life."

**Tom (12:18):**

And we had to stop for a while and talk through that! Because I'm saying, *Wait a minute. I'm thinking military guy, Vietnam. I know what costing your life is!* But he was talking about ... not my physical life. He was talking about the way I was living my life was going to be gone. And that my life would belong to the Lord. And many years later, he was very right on that.

**John (12:50):**

I'm all ... every time I hear ... when I think about my own story. When I hear other people's stories. I think about the majestic God of the universe who pauses and comes to us as individuals in situations, in circumstances just like you're talking about, and *reveals* Himself. He revealed Himself to you through those ... that verse in Scripture. And the whole course of your life from that night to this day was changed.

**Tom (13:32):**

And it started immediately. Military guy with no Spiritual background. I used to tell people I could cuss as good as any two drunk sailors you could find. And I could. But about two days after I asked Christ in my life (laughter), I realized *not a foul word had passed my lips*.

**Owen (13:52):**

I love it. I love it.

**Tom (13:53):**

(Laughter.) The Lord took that away instantly.

**Owen (13:59):**

You know, and let me throw something in. I think this is important here, Tom. I've heard probably a couple of hundred *testimonies* in my life, like we're doing right now. Maybe more. I never thought about the number. But it's interesting, and John, you've probably noticed this. They follow a pattern: There are certain steps and certain experiences that always follow that same pattern. And I had a strange experience one time. I had a pastor in the car with me and we went to a home. And there were about 15 or 18 people in there who wanted to give their *testimony*. So I knew them. But this man did not, this pastor, did not. So to make a long story short as Tom says, we *heard* the testimonies. We thanked everybody, left the home, we were driving away. And he (the pastor) looked at me with a strange, puzzled look on his face.

**Owen (14:57):**

And he said, "Did you notice something strange?" And I said, "No, what was it?" He said, "All of those testimonies were exactly the same." He said, "All the people said, you know, they had a crisis. They were broken. They had, *yada-yada*. And then something happened. And now everything was better. They don't curse anymore. They don't drink anymore, *buh-buh-buh-buh*." And I thought that was so odd, that he thought it was strange (laughter) that God deals with us all the *same* way. And he was an ordained pastor. But you know, Tom, I've heard it rumored that while you were in Vietnam you had some *miracles* that you didn't even know were miracles: Other than the fact that you lasted longer than 16 minutes! Which by the way, I'm glad you did.

**John (15:45):**

Yeah, yeah.

**Tom (15:45):**

Me, too! (Laughter.) But if it's not too personal, you might share with us a couple of the most interesting things that happened in Vietnam.

**Tom (15:56):**

Well, I have a number of stories I could share. And ... but *one* in specifics stands out in my mind. It was the night I was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for that action. An aircraft had gone down and we got called on an emergency at the ... to get out there and see if we could get the crew out. And there was what they called a "LRRP," a Long Range Reconnaissance (Patrol) team out there with them. Unfortunately, they had been inserted into a tree line earlier that afternoon. And the tree line was occupied by a battalion of Viet Cong. So you had roughly three

(hundred) men in the Viet Cong battalion, with 12 of our soldiers on the ground. And we went out there and we tried to get in. There were three helicopters that went out there.

**Tom (17:00):**

The first two got shot down. And I was flying third. And we managed to get in. And we got everybody on board. The other crews, the men, including the dead. We don't leave our bodies on the battle ground if at all possible. And anyway, we were so overloaded I had to *disengage* the governor on the engine. And we flew out of there at 125 percent of the maximum rating on that turbine engine. And the rotor blades were actually "coning up" (slanting upward). We had 20 or 21 people on board an aircraft designed to carry 11. And so we were all coming out, or we were all going die there, one of the two. And by God's grace we came out. We flew to the hospital for the wounded. And the next morning when we had daylight, we went out and looked at the aircraft. And it had so much damage to it that they ... it was cheaper to replace it with a new one than to repair it. And they just moved it to the scrap pile.

**Owen (18:07):**

Goodness.

**John (18:09):**

And so when I hear things like that. I just see the sovereign hand of God. His purpose and His plan for your life was for you to survive that. And I'm ... it just makes the hair on my head stand up. Thinking about that, Tom.

**Tom (18:35):**

(Pauses.) Does mine even to this day. Just recalling that story. It's an emotional thing today. And it's 54 years later.

**John (18:46):**

Wow.

**Owen (18:47):**

Fifty-four years? Well, that would be true, wouldn't it.

**John (18:49):**

Yeah, yeah.

**Owen (18:53):**

That's amazing, Tom. But looking back on my life, as we think here a second, I came of age *between* Korea and Vietnam. I joined the Marines in 1955. And then got out in the early sixties.



So I missed both of those (chuckles) horrible conditions. But I knew many friends, of course were "regulars" that we called them, who had stayed in. I was a reservist for 10 years. And I've had many of these conversations around tables (chuckles) and ... but it's ... isn't it interesting, Tom. That some are spared and so many are not. And you just wonder why, don't you.

**Tom (19:43):**

That's been a difficult question for me because I've thought that over. Over people that I know. And I've had a number of people tell me – as you just spoke of, Owen – and that ... you know ... you missed the *wars*. And I would tell you: You didn't miss a thing. (Laughter.) Just ... it's a horrible experience. Yet it's a necessary thing in the world we live in.

**Owen (20:13):**

And *every* world down through history, starting with Cain and Abel. (Laughter.)

**John (20:18):**

So Tom, I just see that here you are from upstate New York. You thought you were going to be in a steel mill your whole life. God's first really *intervention* into that redirected you into the military. It made a huge imprint in your life. How could it not? You spent so many years there. By the way, I haven't said this: We collectively want to thank you for your service to our country.

**Owen (20:47):**

Amen!

**Tom (20:47):**

Thank you.

**John (20:48):**

But in the midst of that, this young man comes to you, slaps a Bible on your chest. (Laughter.) And we have a little saying around here that you're familiar with, "But God." And God, *there* He is. He changes the trajectory of your life. And something that was vital in those early days of your Christian life. I've heard you speak of it, is you were thrown into, if you will, the "Navigators" (a Christian training organization) of studying the Scriptures. And God's word just became life to you.

**Tom (21:28):**

You hit it right on the head, John. For a fellow who had absolutely no knowledge of the Scriptures at all, the Navigators were the place to be. The very first weekend, I was off with a group of guys and they were reading their Bibles. So I said, *I better start reading the Bible*. (Laughter.) They were memorizing Scripture. *I guess I better start memorizing Scripture*. They

were telling people about a relationship with Christ. *Well, I guess I better start telling people about a relationship with Christ.*

**John (21:57):**

I love it!

**Tom (21:58):**

And it sounds so surface just to say that. But those were the roots of being birthed in Christ: That you would grow in the word. Scripture says, "Like newborn babes, desire the sweet milk of the word, that by it you may grow with respect to Salvation." And God's whole intent for each one of us is that we would grow in our relationship with Him. I love what Jesus said. He said, "And this is eternal life: That you know Him who sent me." And so it's about knowing God in a relationship. It's not for when you die. Although when you die you do have an eternal life. (Chuckles.) But it's for knowing the heavenly Father who loves you so much.

**John (22:47):**

Yeah, yeah. Tom, I want to just drill down a little even more specific here. So you've come to Christ. You've in the word now. You're studying it, understanding it. And so where did – or *when* did, maybe – just an awareness of dependence upon the Holy Spirit in your life. If we started today talking about ... as we do every episode ... about how the Early Christians ... they had *peace*, and *healing*, and *hope*, and the Holy Spirit brought that to their lives as they were seeking Him. Tell us about how that transpired in your life. Because I know that it did.

**Tom (23:34):**

Well, there are several things that enter into that. In the days and weeks following becoming a Christ follower, a genuine *peace* just over overcame me – actually it overwhelmed me. (Laughter.) Because up to that point of asking Christ into my life, my insides were in all kinds of turmoil. I just ... I was hollow and empty on the inside. And there was just nothing there. I looked great on the outside: chest full of metals, great job in the military. But inside I was shot. And so in those early days, a *peace* came over me. I started growing. And I started learning some of the promises that God was giving me from His word – and that they were *personal*. They were for *me*. And so I started being enriched in those, and started having relationships with other men who had similar interests. And so it started transforming my life.

**Tom (24:50):**

Probably the biggest point though, was about 14 months after I'd become a believer. I was at big weekend conference. There (were) about 350 people there. And 30 of us were invited to a special meeting with the guest speaker for that weekend. He was a dynamic guy. Military Marine, jet pilot. But he was so dynamic and charismatic. And he started speaking to us, and we just became all excited. And we're whooping and hollering and having a great time, and all about the things we were doing in the Christian life: learning and helping other men come to know Christ and everything. And he asked an excited question. "How many you want to be here

10 years from now, doing these things?" And everybody whooped and hollered and said, "Oh yeah, yeah, that's great!" And the man turned as ice cold as any man I've ever known. And he said, "How many of you *will* be here 10 years from now?"

**Tom (25:58):**

There was silence in that room. Only two men out of those 30 raised their hands. I was not one of the two. And that's when I clearly heard the audible voice in my head of the Holy Spirit. And I knew I had to make a decision right then. And I told the Lord that I would walk with him *no matter what* for the rest of my life. And there's been some pretty rough *no-matter-whats* that have come in my life. And there's been times I've been tired enough to say, "I want to quit." But God just keeps drawing me to Himself. There's no way I can ... there's no way I can quit. So those were the great experiences. And then on ... He allowed me to have a military career in impossible ways. I should *not* have been able to complete a career because I didn't have the education. But He provided it for me for the next, I guess, 13 or years or so.

**Owen (27:04):**

What did you do? Retire at 20, Tom?

**Tom (27:07):**

Uh, a bit over 20. Almost 21.

**Owen (27:10):**

(Laughter.) Sounds like you were counting the days!

**Tom (27:14):**

No, if I could have, I would have stayed till 30.

**Tom (27:18):**

But things transpired in my life. First off, I did not have a college degree. And so I spent 14 years at night school getting an undergraduate degree. When I finally got that, shortly after that, I was promoted to major. Which was a real surprise – again for not having the education. They wanted me to get a master's degree and complete Command and General Staff College. But I was on an assignment in Europe that kept me out in the field totally half of my three years there. And so there just wasn't a way to do it. And so I told the army I wasn't going to do it. And they told me, "That's fine. We're not going to promote you." Okay. So ... and in the midst of this, I ought to fill in, too, I'm raising four children and, you know, the other ...

**Owen (28:15):**

Life happens.

**Tom (28:16):**

... life happens ... things. Right. So things traveled along. And I came up for promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. And I was passed over for promotion. Which I expected because I had made those choices. And so second promotion board met. And you're allowed on ... after your second pass over, you have to get out of the service within six months of the date you're notified – unless you have 18 years service. So I got passed over the second time. We calculated my date. And I had 17 years, 11 months, and 23 days in service. I was *seven* days short of being allowed to stay to retire. Well, I just went back to work, doing my job. My boss, he was crying when he told me I was, you know, I was going to be put out.

**Tom (29:14):**

And other people ... I had a general ask me, "I don't understand you! Why are you still doing your job so well, you know, when you're being booted out?" Well, I had a chance to tell that man, general, about Jesus Christ. We were out in a tent in the middle of the field. Now he didn't make a decision that night. But about three weeks later, his wife and my wife were at a meeting. And his wife told my wife everything I told him out in the tent. So he *heard*. But anyway, it kind of wrapped this story up because it was so significant. The hand of God moving. I'd been passed over at about four months into those six months that I had before I had to be out. I got a letter from Washington. And it was from the Office of Personnel Management. And they offered me something called "selective continuation," which they can do. But it requires by-name-congressional-approval. And they only offered it to two officers that year. What's really amazing is, I did not apply for it.

**Owen (30:33):**

Wow. (Laughter.)

**Tom (30:35):**

But I was one of the two that was selected to get ... receive "selective continuation." Which allowed me to stay in service up to 20 years. But I was working on a project for another general, and he wasn't letting me out until the project was done. So that gave me about six months more.

**John (30:57):**

Tom, I think about that as: That God is such a good God, and that He is always working in our life. He's not static. He's dynamic. He is always working in "unseen" ways, in "seen" ways, behind the scenes, out in front – you name it. And it's just mind boggling, really, to think about that: That God sees the beginning from the end, the end from the beginning and ... (inaudible) and He is at work in our lives. I take great comfort in that.

**Owen (31:41):**

You know, John. There's that wonderful verse that Paul wrote that: "God had good deeds for us to do before we were born." (Ephesians 2:10)

**John (31:50):**

Right.

**Owen (31:51):**

And He wants us to *do* them.

**John (31:52):**

Yeah, yeah.

**Owen (31:52):**

The problem is, we don't know what those are, you know, except they unfold as our life unfolds. So it'd be interesting with Tom here to know had he stayed in and done everything that they wanted to do, and *yada-yada*, how his life would be different today. It's interesting. It's so, so interesting. Well, Tom. Again, what we talk about so much in our book *Saving Christianity*, and in this podcast by the same name, we talk about the *miraculous* way that the Early Christians lived in those first three centuries of Christian history before the Roman emperors changed Christianity in the Fourth Century. And so those first three centuries – about eight or nine generations of the first Christians – were miraculous. Paul called it "Walking in the Spirit." There are many other terms for it throughout the Scripture: "Walking in the Light," so many beautiful terms. My question is: You had these wonderful miracles in combat in Vietnam. Then once you got out and became a civilian, did the miraculous part of your life *end*?

**Tom (33:16):**

Absolutely not. (Laughter.) No, no. My wife may disagree with you on me becoming a "civilian" because my heart was in the military. But see, that's what the Lord said. He's going to give us the desires of our heart. And as a little boy, my desire was to be a military pilot. Never thinking I could do it. Yet He gave it to me.

**John (33:40):**

He made a way.

**Tom (33:40):**

And so He has blessed my life in miraculous ways. Just being able to complete a career was miraculous. He really led me into some wonderful miracle experiences. I left Vietnam in 1972 and retired out of the service in 1986. And the Lord kind of let things dormant in some ways in that area of my life. Until in 2009 a fellow who heads up a ministry asked me if I would consid-

er going back to Vietnam with him. Now, my thought was, *That's the last place I ever want to go back to.* And ... but this man works dominantly in Communist countries. I've been with him in Vietnam, and Laos, works in Cuba, Ukraine, places like that. And anyway, in 2010 I *did* go back to Vietnam with him.

**Tom (34:52):**

And that opened up some of the miracles. We landed in Hanoi, which was a very *déjà vu* minute for me. You know, it was the capital of my enemy. But in the months in preparing, I was in turmoil about going to Vietnam. Until I was just reading in the Bible one day. I happened to read in the 23rd Psalm where it says, "I have set a table for you in the presence of thine enemies." And instantly that *peace* we talked about came over me. So I ended up back in Vietnam, up in the old North Vietnam. And we flew 30-some hours to get there, and had about three hours of rest. And we were up doing what we were doing. We helped disciple and raise up church leaders. And so there was a small house church meeting over in the city of Haiphong, which was the most bombed city in the war.

**Tom (35:54):**

And we went over there to speak to these people. Now, we had to make sure that we avoided the police and other things like that. But ... because Christianity is *illegal* there. But we get there, and this fellow named Henry is speaking. And he's celebrating his 50th year in the pulpit. And Henry could wax eloquent. And I'm a layman. And the director of the ministry said, "Tom, you follow Henry." (Laughter.) So I'm thinking, *Oh, great.* So there I am. Henry's speaking. And if you don't speak for at least an hour, the Vietnamese will tell you you've short-changed them. So Henry's speaking. And Holy Spirit speaks to me. He says, "Tom, tell them about God's love."

**Tom (36:49):**

And this little imaginary conversation between me and the Holy Spirit's going on. And I said, "Well, I didn't prepare a message on God's love." Holy Spirit says, "I didn't care. I don't care whether you prepared a message. Tell them about God's love." So we go back and forth a little bit. You know, in my mind and all. And so I'm scribbling all the notes I can, and looking in my concordance. (A reference book.) Trying to put together something coherent about *God's love*. And Henry finishes. I have some notes that made some halfway sense. And I'm starting to rise up out of my chair, because you don't take a break or anything. It's one right to the next. And the director of the ministry says, "Oh, Tom. Tell 'em about your time here during the war."

**Tom (37:37):**

And so the very first words I spoke to the people were, "Forty years ago, my country sent me over here to fight and kill the Vietnamese people." And you could feel the whole room back up emotionally. But then I followed this ... and these are exact quotes ... I said, "But today, my God has sent me here to love and be loved by the Vietnamese people." And I went into my message.

**Tom (38:04):**

As I spoke, there was one man sitting in the front row. Tears started going down his cheeks. And his front of his shirt started getting damp. Before I finished, the man was wailing. And all this time, I'm trying to figure out what's going on with him. Well, I got a chance to talk to him through an interpreter afterwards. And he had been a *North Vietnamese soldier*. Had fought against the Americans. And his government had taught him to *hate* Americans. And he had become a Baptist pastor. And for 40 years, he carried a burden of hatred with him. And the message that the Holy Spirit asked me to give broke 40 years of bondage in that man's heart.

**Tom (38:52):**

(Praise and thanksgiving sounds.) That was a miracle. It also told me I knew I needed to be in Vietnam. And so I continued in that ministry there. In that ministry over there, I've seen the lame walk. I've seen the blind receive sight. I've seen people completely cured of cancer – stage four cancer – overnight. The doctors could not find anything the next day. Heart failure. I'm aware ... I did not personally witness this ... but I very much trust the people who have told me this. That there was a young woman who was raised from the dead. So those types of miracles have become part of our life. We're seeing miracles here today in our small group that we've had a focus on *healing* for about two years now. And we've seen healings take place in that group. And so you know, miracles are very much a reality. They're very much a part of the normal Christian life.

**Owen (40:01):**

And you know Tom, if I could jump in right there. John and I have talked about this 10,000 times probably. But I think one of the most horrible, tragic, things that has ever occurred is that so many Christians today are taught by their pastors, by their Sunday school teachers, that miracles *ended* at the close of the First Century. I was taught that when the last of the original apostles, disciples, who of course was John, was in his nineties at the time when he died in Ephesus around 98 or 99 AD, all miracles *ended*.

**Owen (40:10):**

Well number one, you think, *Well, wait a minute. Why would that be so good? The Bible doesn't say that. That's not even logical.* And yet everybody teaches it. I was taught it. And I didn't realize until my thirties that miracles *did* still happen today. And we see them, frankly, weekly if not daily among our circle of Christian friends. And so I don't know if you were ever taught that. I guess you *weren't* (chuckles) since you didn't have *any* Bible teaching. But I praise God that you weren't.

**Tom (41:19):**

Well, that turned out to be a blessing. (Laughter and agreement.) Because basically I took *Bible for Dummies*, and just started. I read through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. And pretty much didn't understand what I read. So I did it a second time. And a third time. And

along the way things started making sense. But it also started giving me the roots in the Scripture that I needed. There are two things I think that are very important here. The word of God is truth. Jesus Christ is truth. And without truth in a person's life, you're open for every deception imaginable. So we have to have a *truth* to look to. And in truth, Scripture is very clear that that Christians will heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out demons. These are parts of the normal Christian life. I tell people in this I'm not a theologian. But you know what I think, I come and look at this and say: "God is a supernatural Being. Why should I not expect him to act supernatural?" That's who He is. I just ...

**John (42:41):**

Yeah, I Love that!

**Tom (42:42):**

... I expect God to be God.

**John (42:44):**

Right.

**Tom (42:44):**

And I approach my Christian life that way. And back to what you said just a moment ago, Owen. Nowhere in the Scripture is there any indication that God has *stopped* miracles.

**John (42:57):**

Yeah, for sure. Yeah, yeah.

**Owen (42:59):**

Well, you know, they used to ... I've been taught and told, just to close that out, Tom, that the reason "miracles died" was that once Christianity was established and had proved to the world that they were there ... that they were real ... that they were supernatural, that *that* never had to be proved again. In my view, it's *more* necessary today than it was in the First Century. So again, all of that's thrown into a "Cocked Hat."

**Owen (43:32):**

So you know, John. I'm looking at the big clock on the wall here and thinking that I ... (pauses) frankly ... this is one of our episodes that I hate to cut off. And frankly, I think we should have Major Tom back sometime and have "Tom's Story, Number Two." And go deeper into some of these incredible stories and his experiences in Vietnam. But I don't know, it looks like it's time to wrap it up for "Part One" here. So we really appreciate you, Major Tom. We love you. And I'm going to hand off to John now.



**John (44:13):**

Yes, unfortunately, Owen. It is that time to bring it to a close. And thank you, Tom. We really appreciate you sharing "Your Story" today, and how God has intersected in your story time and time again. Well, friends, this is Episode 34. And remember, a script and a recording of it (are) at our website. That's goSCpod.com. That's G-O-S-C-P-O-D.com. And it's important to review the recordings and transcripts of these episodes, and especially the one for this episode.

**Owen (44:51):**

Right, right. John, I think that's totally true. In fact, I'm going to listen to this two or three times myself. This has been a fascinating, wonderful show, John. And I know we're all praying now that this episode, called "Tom's Story," when it goes out to our international followers, that it'll inspire them, encourage them, uplift them worldwide. And I'm just praying for that. God bless you, Major Tom, for coming. We hope to see you back soon. But until then, this is Owen Allen ...

**John (45:28):**

... and John Shields, along with our producer, Shannon Wolfe ...

**Owen (45:32):**

... and all of us are saying together: May the God of our fathers bless you, and keep you, and guide, you and protect you, until we meet again.

**Owen and John (45:46):**

Owen and John end the episode.