

Robert Allen Case II, July 19, 2025

I suppose every serious and thoughtful Christian reflects from time to time on the fact that, as we read here in Psalm 139, our lives were mapped out for us beforehand: the ups and the downs, the steps forward and backward, the crises or turning points, and the periods of stasis and of calm. We ought to remember this more than we do – that there are no true accidents in anyone’s life, but only the revelation of a divine plan – for who can deny that it changes things to know that we live our days, one after another, according to a script that was written by perfect genius and infinite love before we, or even the world, was made.

Death gives all of us who remain the opportunity to think about our life in those terms. Your life, mine, is a story that God wrote long ago but that we are living now, day by day. When the death of a Christian brother or sister occurs, we find that we are better able to see the twists and turns now for what they were and for what they led to. We may not be able to explain why God ordered our steps as he did; indeed, we may never know that fully, even in heaven. But by faith we can rest in the confidence that whatever comes next, whatever tomorrow brings, will be what our Heavenly Father has, in his love and wisdom, ordered for us and for his kingdom. In the midst of our life’s twists and turns it is hard to see the whole, certainly impossible to see the end, the sum of our life. But we are here told that God sees it all, because he knows what he has planned for us, and he knows why. And, if we do not know his plan, we do know his heart and his character. *The same God who planned our steps, one after another, died for our sins on the cross!* The same Yahweh, to whom the psalmist speaks in the few verses we read from Psalm 139, is, we are reminded repeatedly in the New Testament, none other than Jesus Christ.

I couldn’t help think of this in thinking about Bob’s life. It was marked by twists and turns in a way quite unusual. Here is a man who had many jobs! Certainly his life was not like mine, nor, I suspect, not like most of your lives. I was raised in a Christian home, went to a Christian college. I arrived at Covenant Seminary when Bob was in his last year. So we crossed paths quite early. But our paths then diverged dramatically. I took another degree, entered the pastorate, and remained in the same place for the next 41 years. Apparently, it required fewer thoughts on the Lord’s part to write my story. But Bob was raised in an unbelieving home in central Washington. At 18 or 20 years of age, he would have been stunned to learn that he would live the life he lived. Nothing in his youth or his

upbringing would have prepared him for the life God had planned for him. He went to the University of Washington as any other conservative young American man might do, with plans for a future of prosperity, comfort, and genial conformity to American norms of thought and behavior. Then he was confronted by Jesus Christ through the ministry then known as *Campus Crusade*, and his world was turned upside down. He met and married a Christian woman. They left America for Europe to build a Campus Crusade ministry there. In those days, that was hardly a likely career move. Campus ministry then, as it is now, is far less successful in Europe than in the United States.

Making their way to L'Abri, as many young Christians in Europe did in those days, they met Francis Schaeffer, then near the beginning of his fame and worldwide influence. Bob was thinking that he needed further theological education and Schaeffer steered him, as he did a number of other young men, to Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis. Bob prospered there, soaking up the biblical/theological education and the personal influence of a number of the professors.

Having graduated from a Presbyterian seminary, he pursued, as was natural, the pastoral ministry in a faithful Presbyterian Church, but came to realize, after some time, that this would not be his life's calling. He thought it would, but that was not the life God had planned for him. God had not made him for the pastorate. That he was then tabbed to be the first director of the first major Protestant evangelical pro-life ministry, at the very time abortion was slowly becoming a defining issue for evangelicals, is a testament to his obvious ability, ingredients of leadership that were obvious to others. But it was, again, no easy assignment that he had undertaken. Only some evangelicals were really on board and many were not. Pioneers in that field, like Bob, laid a foundation, but it would be some years before evangelical Christians were prepared to invest heavily in ministries like *Care Net*.

Then, what seemed to be a detour: a return to Ellensburg and a career in the family real estate business. But what a detour! Not only time to further his education with two more degrees, not only the opportunity to assume positions of leadership in the community, but an academic career at Central Washington University, the appointment by President Reagan to a National position, and seats on important statewide political organizations.

As would become clear only later, all of this prepared him for something else, something that, at the time, never occurred to him.

Having been elected to the Board of God's World Publications, the organization that published *World* magazine, still then in its early years, he was plucked by Joel Belz from Ellensburg to start the World Journalism Institute, a project with the aim of providing promising young Christians more of the wherewithal with which to find work in professional media and to do that work intelligently as a servant of Jesus Christ. It began in Asheville, the home of *World*, but was, understandably, eventually located in New York City, the headquarters of American journalism. The institute eventually rented space in the Empire State Building. This placed Bob in a position to meet and make friends of influential Christian thinkers and writers, men and women who would provide the lectures, internships, and inspiring examples for the young students of the Institute. This was hugely stimulating for Bob, as you can imagine, but it was also life-changing for the students to meet and hear these men and women.

Some of you will remember the appearance here at Faith of some of these Institute *fellows*. Eric Mataxas not long before he stood next to President Obama at the Washington Prayer Breakfast. Ross Douthat who had shortly before landed a regular gig at the *New York Times*. We met them and heard them, because Bob knew them and was friends with them.

Now, tell me, how does a kid from a small central Washington town, provided with no Christian foundation in his family, follow such a course, do so many fascinating things with his life, and influence so many people in such positive ways? Well, I will tell you. The Almighty's eyes saw his unformed substance; in God's book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for Bob Case, when as yet there was none of them! Bob's is the story of a providential life, a life directed, shaped, nurtured, and equipped by the Holy Spirit for service in Christ's kingdom. Little as Bob knew his future, his heavenly Father knew it down to the tiniest detail. It seems to me, now from this vantage point, very evident that only in this way can we explain the remarkable life of Bob Case, its twists and turns, but throughout its unifying principle: the service of Christ and his gospel.

We all understand that our lives are the sum of God's sovereign disposal and direction *together with* our own faith and obedience. The juxtaposition

of God's sovereign rule and our freedom and responsibility is a great mystery, but it lies face up on every page of the Bible and is a central fact of biblical revelation.

So, we cannot consider Bob's story as solely the outworking of a divinely written plot, true and fabulously important as that fact must be. There was, throughout, Bob's personal engagement with the steps the Lord had ordered for him; his willing acquiescence in the plan God had for him. He confessed Christ as a student at college, but he didn't have to become a campus evangelist. But he did. He didn't need to take the dramatic, uncertain step to go to Europe to try his hand at campus ministry, an unlikely prospect in the mid-1960s. But he did. Had he not, he would never have met Francis Schaeffer. After graduation from seminary and after two pastoral ministries, he didn't have to accept the pioneering work of gathering evangelicals together to combat the culture of abortion; but he did. When he later went home, a step he must have felt was a step backward, he didn't have to redeem the time in Ellensburg, continuing his study, advancing the interests of the community, becoming a professor at the university, and a political activist, but he did. When asked to move to Asheville, NC, he didn't have to accept the daunting challenge of, once again, building from the ground up a fledging ministry that had never been tried before, an institute to recruit and train bright young Christians for service in the world of professional journalism, when bright Christian students were hardly being sought by the media industry. But he did.

All of these quite different forms of Christian service, all of them beset by challenges of every kind, he undertook in what he saw as his way of serving the Lord who had bought his life at the price of his death on the cross, had forgiven his sins, and had given him a great purpose in life. And the result has been a great impact for truth and light and opportunity for many through the years.

Did Bob fail at points in his Christian life? Of course he did. In many ways. I knew him well enough to know *that!* But then, what believer has ever lived in this world who did not have feet of clay? What saint has there ever been who did not have to mourn to the end of his days his many failures of thought, word, and deed? Richard Baxter said that he had never done anything in his life which might not and ought not to have been done better. True enough. But even more true what John Duncan, 19th century Scotland's *Rabbi Duncan*, said of himself: "I have never done a sinless

action during the seventy years [of my life]. I don't say but by God's grace there may have been some holy action done, but never a sinless action during the seventy years. What an awful thing is human life? And what a solemn consideration it should be to us, that we have never done a sinless action all our life, that we have never done one act that did not need to be pardoned."

We didn't once need a savior. We didn't once need the forgiveness of our sins. We have needed that savior and that forgiveness every step of the way! No Christian has ever solved the problem of the flesh, our sinful nature, or its remnants in our new life in Christ. Every Christian carries into his new life the distempers with which he was born, in which he was raised, and over which, even in Christ he never gained true mastery. We go to heaven, every Christian goes to heaven, with deep regret over both his commissions and his omissions. They are to him shame and sorrow. But every Christian finds, and will find, that the cross having had its effect, the Lord took our little for a great deal more than it was worth, and every sin that marked our pilgrimage in sad and troubling ways was a sin already completely forgiven. That too is the story of our lives written before the world was made.

No wonder the Puritan, Nathaniel Ward, should say that he had two comforts in life: the perfections of Christ and the imperfections of everyone else! It is the grace of God in a Christian's life that we remember, we who are sinners ourselves, the sins and imperfections of others, only that we may forgive and forget them, as we will want ours to be forgotten and forgiven. So, as at the funeral of every Christian brother and sister, we remember Bob's love for Christ, his commitment to his kingdom, and the good work he did in the Lord's name.

Some of you may have seen and heard a lecture given by Os Guinness at the recent *Alliance for Responsible Citizenship* conference in London in February of this year. The *Alliance* is not a Christian organization, many speakers were in no way outspoken followers of Jesus Christ. But one speaker certainly was, an original member of the L'Abri staff, and, interestingly, an acquaintance and friend of Bob Case, Os Guinness. I noted, in checking my facts, that Bob was just a few months younger than Os. Os, by the way, is short for Oswald, he having been named by his parents for Oswald Chambers, the Scottish evangelist and missionary and author of the spiritual classic, *My Utmost for His Highest*. I have a

personal interest in Os Guinness, since my late sister dated him for a time! Given that the audience was not by any means uniformly Christian and the fact that they were certainly not there to hear a sermon, I thought his address was a superb witness to the truth as it is in Christ, winsome and without offense.

At the conclusion of his speech, Os recollected hearing a debate on the BBC between Jonathan Sacks, the Jewish rabbi, man of letters, and professor at several English and American universities, and Richard Dawkins, the pit-bull defender of Darwinism and atheism. As the debate neared its conclusion, Rabbi Sacks said, “Richard, you’re tone deaf. You just don’t hear the music.” To which Dawkins replied, “You’re right. I am tone deaf. But there is no music.” Then Guinness went on to say, “It was 60 years ago that I first heard the music.” He was, of course, referring to his own conversion to Christ. It was 60 years ago when Bob Case first heard the music. And he continued to hear it through those 60 years. And not hear it only; he sang along, in his stentorian voice, beat the time with his feet, and looked for others who, with him, could form a choir. Not the best choir, surely, but perhaps the most enthusiastic.