

### III. Embracing Tradition

#### **FISHER ANDERSON Interview**

**WELCOMED:** Tell us a little about your background and what readers should know about how faith became real in your life.

**Fisher Anderson:** I was born and raised in a Christian household. Both of my parents are believers, and my sister and I were raised in the church largely for moral grounding. But for a long time, church felt more like an institution than a living faith. It was part of the culture I inherited. I went to youth group on Sundays, and if friends slept over, I brought them too. It was just what we did.

That changed in the winter of my junior year of high school, during COVID. That was the moment when faith became something real and personal for me, something I could point to and say: my life is different because of what Jesus did on the cross for me. That changed where I went to church, who I went to church with, my friend group, the things I said, and the things I did. It changed a great deal. So the big picture is that I always grew up around the church, but there was a definite moment when my life changed, and it has been different since then.

**WELCOMED:** What communities or friendships most shaped that change?

**Fisher Anderson:** One of the most important things was a discipleship group I started attending every week. That was where I learned how to read the Bible, and also how to let the Bible read me. By that I mean learning how to talk to God and how to hear from God through His Word. That was pivotal.

Two close friends were also central: Colin Jackson and Trace Alexander. I had known them before, but when this transformation happened in my life during COVID, their friendship became much more important because they were also going through their own transformations. It became something we could do together. I would talk with them all the time about what I was learning, what I was hearing at church or in discipleship, and what they thought about it. That friendship was a kind of scaffolding for me.

My high school also mattered, and so did football. I went to a large public high school just south of Nashville, and that gave me a sense of how to move through a complicated social environment. The football team was its own world. Every year had its own social dynamics, and those experiences were definitely formative too.

**WELCOMED:** How would you describe your relationship to faith now?

**Fisher Anderson:** My relationship to faith is intricate, but the simplest word is dependent. Faith is not an extra layer in my life. It is foundational. When I gave my life to Jesus in high school, I had reached a kind of rock bottom, with minor depression, lack of purpose, and lack of identity. That gave me the chance to rebuild from scratch, and from then on I wanted to build my life in line with what Jesus said in His Word.

Before that, I was trying to keep Christianity plus everything else. I wanted to be Christian and still be really cool, still keep all the social credibility, still do all the things I wanted. That kind of life gets unstable very quickly. It includes bits and pieces of Christianity, but it does not really look like Jesus.

So when I say faith, I do not mean some generic idea that God exists or that good things happen to good people. I mean specific faith in Jesus Christ: that He is the Son of God, that He lived a perfect life, that He died on the cross, and that He rose from the dead three days later. If that is taken away, I have nothing else left, and that is exactly how I want it.

**WELCOMED:** Has Stanford strengthened, changed, or complicated that faith?

**Fisher Anderson:** I would say all three, but in that order: strengthened, changed, and complicated.

It strengthened my faith because I did not face much opposition to Christianity growing up in the South. No one really challenged it. Stanford was the first place where I encountered real pushback, and that forced me to think much more deeply about why I believe what I believe. In that sense, it has made my faith stronger.

It has also changed or deepened my faith because I have been exposed to many different theological traditions here. The core has not changed. My faith is still centered on Jesus Christ, what He did on the cross, and His resurrection. But now I have more informed views on all kinds of questions that I had only vague opinions about before.

And it has complicated my faith in what I think is a necessary way. I now believe that I could be wrong, and I believe I cannot prove that I am right in some airtight way. Before college, I thought anyone who was atheist or agnostic or not Christian was simply refusing logic. I no longer think that. Stanford has made me more intellectually honest and also more compassionate. I can now say, I cannot prove to you that I am right, but I can show you why I believe what I believe, how my life has changed, and what I see in the lives of others. What you do with that is up to you.

**WELCOMED:** What has Christian community at Stanford meant to you?

**Fisher Anderson:** Fellowship of Christian Athletes has been the biggest community for me. I have been co-president for the last two years, and it has really deepened my faith. My life at Stanford would not be the same without it. I only wish I had gotten involved earlier.

More broadly, my faith is fairly visible on campus, partly because I choose to express it publicly, including through social media. That tends to unite me with other believers more than it separates me from anyone else. On the football team too, embracing my faith has more often brought friendships than cost me them. Most of the time, it creates community rather than division.

**WELCOMED:** What have difficult conversations with nonbelievers or people of other faiths taught you?

**Fisher Anderson:** They have given me much more compassion than I had in high school. Back then I had a much stronger in-group and out-group mindset. I tended to see atheists as simply the other. Now I have many friends who do not believe in God, or who believe differently, and that has helped me understand why people believe what they believe.

That has changed the way I talk about faith. I do not think the gospel changes depending on who you are talking to, but I do think you have to understand the person in front of you if you want to speak honestly and well. Every person has a different story, and I think Stanford has helped me learn how to meet people where they are.

**WELCOMED:** What would you say to a student arriving at Stanford who wants to hold onto faith here?

**Fisher Anderson:** First, know what you believe. That does not mean eliminating all doubt. Doubt can be helpful. But if the basic questions are completely unsettled, then it becomes much harder to live with any confidence once you get here.

Second, pursue community early. Find people who align with what you believe and do life with them. If you are an athlete and a Christian, find FCA or Athletes in Action. If you are not an athlete, find one of the many other Christian communities on campus. Learn from the people already there. See whether they live in a way that matches what they say they believe. Community matters a great deal.

**WELCOMED:** When someone finishes reading your story, what do you hope they understand?

**Fisher Anderson:** I hope they understand that where you put your faith is not a small add-on to your life. It is foundational. What you believe about God shapes what you do and who you are.

I also hope people understand that Stanford is not a godless place. When I committed to Stanford in high school, some older people spoke about it that way, and it just is not true. There have been

many Christians here before me, and there will be many after me. I am just one small part of that. Students here are intellectually curious and willing to ask real questions, and when people are willing to ask questions that matter, important things can happen.