



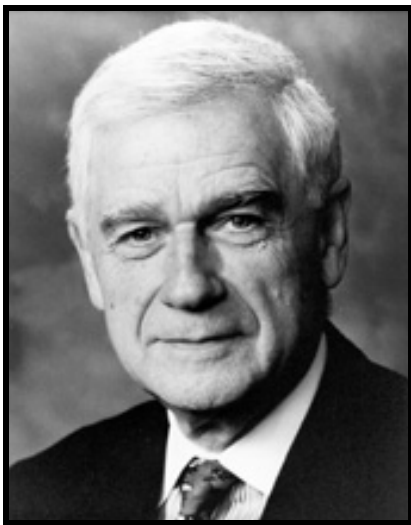
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Mark Hatfield. Photo courtesy of U.S. Senate Historical Office.

## A Spiritual Rebirth and an Answered Prayer

by Lon Fendall

Former U.S. Senator Mark Hatfield does not use “born again” language in speaking of his spiritual renewal experience. For him it was nothing like the “Damascus Road” conversion of the Apostle Paul. Hatfield did not have grievous sins to confess, just an inescapable feeling of spiritual emptiness. And he experienced no emotional struggle, just the firm rational assent of commitment to Christ as Savior.

An important part of Hatfield’s spiritual commitment was the encouragement he both received from and gave to a young man who was then a student at Willamette University, where Hatfield was teaching political science. The young man was Doug Coe, who would later found a group that sponsors the annual presidential prayer breakfast and organizes Bible studies for leaders in the U.S. and around the world. Although Coe had grown up in a Christian home, he struggled spiritually after high school and ultimately left the church.

Although Coe re-dedicated himself to Christ in his sophomore year at college, he was still filled with spiritual doubts and wondered if God really answered prayer. So he decided to set in motion a three-month prayer “experiment,” writing down some requests without telling anyone he had done so. If there really was a God, Coe reasoned, He would answer these prayers. After beginning the experiment, his Bible study group needed a place to meet. Coe went to Hatfield, who was also the Dean of Students, to ask about the use of a room. Hatfield agreed to provide the group with a space.

After that encounter, Coe decided to add Hatfield to his prayer list, feeling that a major spiritual change in Hatfield would be dramatic proof of his prayer experiment. Within three

months Hatfield called Coe into his office. Coe had made some critical comments about Wilamette’s chapels, so he assumed that he was in trouble. Instead, Hatfield asked Coe if he would go with him to a meeting in Corvallis, about 45 minutes away. During the trip, Hatfield told Coe that the night before he had committed his life to Christ. He hadn’t told anyone else this yet and felt that Coe would understand and be supportive. Coe was amazed that Hatfield would confide in him and equally amazed at the striking “proof” of the prayer experiment. He was at a complete loss for words.

The next day Coe went to see Hatfield to apologize for not having said anything supportive about Hatfield’s spiritual testimony. In that exchange, Hatfield asked Coe to pray for him. Coe hesitated, uncomfortable praying out loud and feeling intimidated as an undergraduate, praying for the Dean. Hatfield then reciprocated, praying for Coe. Their time together set in motion a spiritual bonding that became important to both of them. Coe felt his doubts about God had vanished with this dramatic answer to prayer and Hatfield felt that this was someone in whom he could confide as he took his first steps toward spiritual vitality. Hatfield and Coe met regularly for prayer and discussion after that first encounter. Coe marveled at Hatfield’s voracious reading of the Bible and other Christian literature and Hatfield was impressed with Coe’s spiritual intensity.

(NOTE: This article is an excerpt from the manuscript of *Stand Alone or Come Home: Mark Hatfield -- Progressive Evangelical*, a proposed biography of Mark Hatfield by Lon Fendall. )



Lon Fendall, a GOOD NEWS Associate, served as legislative director and campaign manager for Senator Mark Hatfield. He is an author of several books, including *Citizenship: A Christian Calling*, *Unlocking Horns: Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Burundi*, *At Home with the Poor: Christian Community Development in Haiti* and *William Wilberforce: Abolitionist, Politician, Writer*, a volume in Barbour Press’ Heroes of the Faith series.

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