

# Greater Grace: A Story of God, Redemption, and Steve McQueen



I have found the actor Steve McQueen quite a fascinating character and have been interested in finding out a bit about him over recent months. He had a terrible start to life and died of cancer when he was only 50 years old. But the end of his life turned out to be the BEST part of his life, as he found the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. Like so many people do, Steve battled with *his past* throughout his life.

He was born March 24<sup>th</sup> 1930 Beach Grove Indiana, Indianapolis. His father was a wandering stunt pilot – who left his family after only 6 months. His mother was an alcoholic runaway who sought for love in the many men she had, but never seemed to find it. Because Steve’s mother couldn’t handle him, she put him into the Boy’s Republic Reform School – which turned out to be a very tough time in Steve’s life, although it taught him a lot & made him very streetwise.

Steve left the Reform School at age 15 & hit the road. At age 17 he joined the marines for 3 years. He was busted from Corporal to Private seven times! He spent 41 days in the Brig for fighting & going AWOL. After the Marines he found himself in New York City & this is where he found out about acting! He enrolled in acting school & started touring with a company. At the age of 26 he was cast into his first film! He was frustrated with only getting bit parts or playing in B movies but then his break came.

He was given his own western TV series, which proved an enormous success & launched his career. He made many films, most of which, were huge hits with the public! He had made it! From poverty to immense wealth! He got married & had two lovely children, yet he was still battling with his past & his horrendous upbringing seemed to dog him all his life! At one stage he even hired a private detective to try to find his father! Finally after locating him, he found out that he had died 3 weeks earlier. This hit Steve hard! After his mother died at only 55 it seemed to brake him.

***This is an article I found on the internet in regards to Steve McQueen’s life summed up...***

*They said* that he could act with the back of his head! No fancy dialogue or frills required—his mere presence loomed larger than life in every shot. Put him next to some of the finest actors in the business, and he would undercut every one of them simply by being in the frame. His piercingly distinctive blue eyes were set in a rough-hewn, unconventionally handsome face that rarely betrayed strong emotion. His smallest physical gesture was precisely calculated and gracefully executed. You couldn’t best him, you couldn’t buy him, you couldn’t touch him. He was the King of Cool. He was Steve McQueen.

He was the definition of a *self-made man*, working his way up from a horrific childhood of neglect, paternal abuse and a tough life on the streets, to the gold-plated life of a Hollywood icon. He once said that he often had nightmares of everything he had *gained*, being suddenly taken away from him. A man of

many paradoxes - he was both humble and defiant, stingy and generous, gentle and violent, self-assured and insecure. Perhaps it was director Norman Jewison who summed him up best: "**He was a loner, and he was troubled, and he was looking for a father.**"

Everyone had a Steve McQueen story. His superior officers in the Marines could have told you how he spent 41 days in the brig for resisting arrest when caught AWOL. The young men at the Boys' Republic where Steve had spent some of his teenage years could tell you how he regularly came back and visited the school after becoming famous... personally responding to every boy's letters and financially supporting the school until his death. Magnificent Seven co-star, Yul Brynner, could tell you how Steve McQueen **stole scene after scene** by deliberately throwing in extra *distracting bits*, that would grab **the attention**, even though it wasn't supposed to be focused on Steve at *that time!* Bruce Lee could have told you about a hair-raising ride in Steve's Porsche, that had Lee cowering in the foot-well (*and threatening to kill Steve when they stopped*) causing a fearful McQueen to hit the gas again, and *refuse* to slow down until Lee promised not to hurt him!

He was known to say that he lived for himself and answered to no one. Asked once if he believed in God, the actor brazenly replied, "**I believe in me. God will be number one as long as I'm number one.**" That philosophy informed much of his life. All the money, cars, alcohol, drugs and women that a man could ever want, were at his fingertips, and it was only a matter of time before he became addicted in every way. Professional successes only inflated his ego! Wild experimentation with substance abuse drove him to the edge of mental stability. Though he tried to be a good father, to the son and daughter of his first wife, his addictions, serial womanizing, jealousy and violence *burned through* two marriages.

By the late 1970s, his star was fading. The washed-up, aging characters he portrayed reflected where he himself *was* in his life and career. **He felt empty and unsatisfied.** He began turning down huge offers and retreating into his own private shell. He was also developing health problems with his lungs. Doctors told him he should move, so in the spring of 1979, he left Malibu for the small, quiet town of Santa Paula, where he ultimately married his third wife Barbara Minty. For a period of time, they lived in an airport hangar, which he had filled with his *sentire* motorcycle collection. He bought a yellow Stearman bi-plane and learned to fly it, quickly mastering the craft as he had mastered motor racing before.

The pilot who taught him was a man in his early 60s by the name of Sammy Mason. Self-described as cranky and difficult to get along with, he became fast friends with McQueen. As they shared long hours in the air, **talking together about the meaning of life**, Steve sensed that there was something different about him. The more time they spent together, the more he wanted to know what Mason's *secret* was. One day he asked him outright! Mason sat down with the aging actor and explained what, **or rather who**, had made the difference in his life. The answer, he said, was **Jesus Christ**.

McQueen was intrigued. He had so much respect for Mason and his family that he began regularly attending Ventura Missionary Church with them. The pastor was Leonard Dewitt. DeWitt later recalled that the famous icon had sat quietly in the balcony without even introducing himself for several months. When he finally requested a meeting with the pastor, he began firing off questions about life and faith, one after another. After a couple of hours, he leaned back and said, "Well, that about covers it for me." Dewitt said, "*Steve, I just have one question for you.*" McQueen flashed his signature grin... "**You want to know if I've become a born-again Christian,**" he pre-empted. Then "*still smiling, but very serious,*" he told DeWitt that one morning when the pastor had given the invitation, he felt convicted by the Spirit of God and came forward. "**When you invited people to pray with you to receive Christ, I prayed. So yes, I'm a born-again Christian.**"

Everybody around him could tell that he was changed. In Sammy Mason's words, it was "dramatic." He said, "I doubt that I have ever seen a man flourish with more *spiritual reality* in such a short time." Another close Christian friend, John Daly, said that the star's conversion had stunned him. But when Steve talked about his new-found faith, there was no denying the seriousness of his commitment. In Daly's words, "*I think I had more faith that my hammer and saw would have gotten converted before Steve, but I was hearing it from the horse's mouth. I was blown away.*" Under the discipleship of Mason and DeWitt, McQueen could often be found praying & reading his Bible. Around that time, he heard Kris Kristofferson's song, "Why Me, Lord" and embraced the lyrics as his own testimony. He also shared his testimony with friend and former personal assistant, Mario Iscovich, who a decade earlier had been forced to stand by and watch as the actor "lost himself" down the "dark, ugly road" of his sin. As Iscovich puts it, McQueen "*felt he had hurt a lot of people*" but had finally "*made peace with God.*"

Shortly afterwards, McQueen travelled to Chicago to shoot his last film, 'The Hunter'. Although his health was continuing to deteriorate, he was actively reaching out to various people in need. (He had always been generous, especially to kids, but now it sprang from a desire to serve God instead of trying to "cancel out" wrongdoings, which only Christ crucified could pay for!) One of the film's *extras* was a feisty 15-year-old girl named Karen Wilson, who had no money to attend school, and was working to provide for her family and dying mother. Immediately after visiting the family's squalorous ghetto home, McQueen asked if he and Barbara could take the girl back to California with them, and send her to school there. Eventually the mother agreed, and the couple went on to become Karen's legal guardians. Her mother succumbed to cancer almost a year later. Today, Karen is happily married with a family of her own.

Also on the set of 'The Hunter', he gave his last interview to a high school student named Richard Kraus, who had initially been turned away by McQueen's stuntman and told that he never gave interviews. The stubborn teen wouldn't take no for an answer and found a way to approach the legend himself, *who readily agreed.*

In December of that year, he was officially diagnosed with Cancer (pleural mesothelioma), a fast-spreading and incurable form of Cancer. The news was crushing because McQueen had expected God to use him in some *great way* now that he was converted. But he told Pastor DeWitt that he was able to *endure it* because **at least he knew where he would spend eternity**. Still, he was ready to try *anything* for the sake of his children—*too readily*, unfortunately. It led him down an almost year-long road of "unconventional" remedies where he was essentially *taken advantage of* by *quack* doctors (including a faith healer), all to no avail. In a *recorded conversation* from this time period, you can hear Steve McQueen talk about his illness, his faith, and the change in his life.

He says... "***My body is broken...but my spirit isn't broken...my heart isn't broken.***"

You can hear his voice crack when he shares dreams of "***changing some people's lives with what I know of the Lord, and what I have to offer with what's happened to me.***"

He hoped to move to his wife's ranch in Idaho and impact the community there. Sadly, he never got his wish.

One of the last people Steve talked to, was none other than Billy Graham, whom the actor had long wanted to meet. DeWitt informed his contacts in the Graham organization, that McQueen didn't have much time left, and wanted to see the evangelist if it could at all be arranged. Billy Graham came, right before McQueen was flown to a hospital for surgery to remove his tumours. Bed-ridden and on oxygen, McQueen was still, in Graham's words, "a fighter." Graham recalls, "Under that oxygen, he would talk.

His eyes were just as bright, but he looked emaciated and old.” He poured out his life’s story to the evangelist, telling him about his friend Sammy Mason; telling him *how God had made him a new man*. McQueen had misplaced his Bible, so Graham personally inscribed his own Bible and gave it to the dying actor. He stayed by McQueen’s side and prayed with him until they reached the airport, then saw him off on the plane.

McQueen would not survive the operation. Four days after his meeting with Graham, he died of a heart attack with the evangelist’s Bible resting on his chest. It was opened to his favourite verse, that old, familiar promise so simple a child could grasp it, yet so profound the angels cannot comprehend it...

**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.** John 3v16

Today, he is still idolized and remembered for what he left behind in his films. But as remarkable as that legacy is, it will fade away like a forgotten dream at the dawning of eternity’s day. For when the grass has withered, and the young men have utterly fallen, and time like an ever-rolling stream has borne all its sons away, we shall be left with two wonders only: our own *worthlessness* and God’s redeeming love. May we all so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal!

Even though it was tragic that Steve McQueen died of Cancer at only 50 years of age, the moment he stepped out of time & his dying body, he stepped into the eternity of Heaven with everlasting life in the presence of his Saviour! Steve McQueen is in Heaven right now because he asked Jesus Christ to forgive him for all his sins & save him.

John 11v25-27 **Jesus said..., I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believe thou this? ...Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.**

**That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.** Rom 10v9+10

...**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...** 1 Tim 1v15

...**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved...** Acts 16v31

The question to you reader is this, ‘Have you asked Jesus Christ to forgive you of all your sins?’

The day IS coming, *very soon*, when... **God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. ...Behold, I make all things new. ...these words are true and faithful.** Rev 21v4+5

I would urge you reader, to TRUST the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart & ask Him to forgive you of all your sins, & like Steve McQueen, you will enter Heaven & dwell in love, peace & safety forever!