



INSIDE MY SKIN

(DWELLS THE GODHEAD)

ABSTRACT

This is the story of the experiences my King provided to sandpaper and polish me during my earthly "Boot Camp." I am anticipating the Bema Judgement, and my eternal assignments to do His bidding in the Kingdom of God.

Ralph Neighbour Jr.

INSIDE MY SKIN *Dwells the Godhead*
An Autobiography

INTRODUCTION

In late August of 2021 a Brazilian couple, Silvia and Washington Andrade, visited me in my home. They shared their ministry had started 20 years ago and that I had influenced them greatly through my books and seminars. They shared about their ministry planted in Mozambique. God has powerfully used them to impact that nation.

Silvia asked me if I had ever written down the story of my journey. I explained many had asked for it, but I had not yet written it. She passionately begged me, on behalf of all those in her generation who needed its wisdom, to produce it.

I sensed the Lord sent her to prod me. I would like to thank her for being God's agent in my life. Silvia, here is what you asked for. Let it be evidence of what God wants practiced!

I must share that the veracity of what I have recorded here may or may not be completely factual in every case. Time has passed and memories sometimes are shaped to fit what wants to be remembered in a certain way. That is why I have titled this book, *Under My Skin Dwells the Godhead*. This statement is verified by these verses:

Galatians 2:20: *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.* Colossians 2:9: *For in Christ all the fulness of the Godhead lives in bodily form.*

I fear few Christians really understand that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have formed our human bodies to be containers for the Three-In-One to occupy. Only the Godhead expresses *agape*. Whenever the believer manifests *agape*, he is revealing the indwelling nature of God, who alone can manifest *agape*. As we allow Him to control. us, God expresses what human flesh can never convey.

Before I begin telling you my story, I want to share why I start each day with a special prayer,

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I was introduced to a 14-year-old girl who desperately needed help. I took her into the kitchen where we sat down facing each other on old folding chairs.

She began to pour out her story. At age 12, she was introduced to drugs. This led to prostitution. In frustration, her mother had recently kicked her out of the house. At 15, she was living on the street. She wept bitterly; she did not have anyone to help her.

I looked out the dingy window in the kitchen and saw the Hahnemann hospital on the horizon. I asked her to look at it with me and said,

"Sweetheart, do you see that window in the hospital? Let's imagine it's a delivery room and a beautiful little girl is being born right now. What would you say if I told you that you could become exactly like that baby?"

She replied, "I would give my life for that if I could!"

I explained that was exactly what she had to do, give her life to Jesus. As I explained the plan of salvation to her using John 3:16, the Holy Spirit drew her to repentance.

Instead of asking her to repeat a prayer after me, I encouraged her to use her own words to ask Jesus to live inside her body. Her prayer became one of the most profound statements I had ever

heard! I have encouraged hundreds of people around the world to receive Christ by saying her exact words:

“Dear Jesus, all I know about me I give to all I know about you!”

The Holy Spirit had let her capture this critical truth about salvation. While it begins at a moment of time, our salvation stretches for a lifetime. There must be a continual exchange between what we know about ourselves and what we know about God. Maturity is a process that requires constant self-examination, surrender, cleansing, restoration. Like rings on a tree reveal growth, salvation comes in stages as we journey through the stages of life.

As a five-year-old, I could yield myself to God, not knowing that as a 19-year-old questioning college student, I would temporarily doubt His existence. As I knelt in that Northwestern College cafeteria, I was not being born a second time into the kingdom as I poured out my heart. My salvation had always been secure, but a whole new piece of me at that moment was totally surrendered to my Lord.

My heart aches for so many church people to understand how critical it is to understand that salvation is a progressive, lifelong activity. That young girl’s prayer requires repeated surrender. I will never know all about Me until I meet my Master face-to-face. Only then will know all about Him.

This book is the story of my learning how to give all of me to Him.

PART 1: BOOT CAMP 1929-1959

My story begins with a family dynasty founded by Robert Edward Neighbour, born in 1872. He married Nellie Gertrude Planck in 1895. They had four children, Charles, Marie, Robert and my father Ralph.

R. E. was a brilliant mind and a passionate follower of Christ. He was also an adventurous entrepreneur who lived on the edge, obeying quickly whatever God assigned him to do. He attended Baylor University. It was while there he spent one summer working on a railroad, traveling in a caboose with a group of godless older men. It had been his custom for years to kneel at the bedside each night before going to sleep. That first night in the caboose the men were drinking and swearing. He decided to kneel and pray. As he did so, a boot hit him on the shoulder and the men began to ridicule him: “Now I lay me down to sleep; Lord, I pray my soul to keep!”

As he finished praying and slipped under the covers the Holy Spirit spoke to him and said, “You are my appointed son. You will proclaim My name among the nations.”

He began his ministry as a church planter in the Southern Baptist Convention. My father was born as he planted in Salisbury, South Carolina. Later he planted the Marie Baptist Church (named after his daughter) in Americus, Georgia. Told around our dinner table when I was a child, was the account of how on Prayer Meeting nights he summoned church members to march down the street singing “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” entering the church building.

In the late 1800s he went to Brazil for the Foreign Mission Board to open the Amazon River to evangelize tribal groups. After his first term, he returned to the USA and began to raise funds in Baptist churches to buy a larger boat for his ministry. After the large sum had been collected, he presented it to the national headquarters for the purchase. He was reprimanded! He had competed with the Lottie Moon Christmas offering. Distribution must be decided by a “Committee!” This so angered him that he immediately returned every penny to the original sources and shook the dust of Southern Baptists from his shoes! For the rest of his life, he detested denominationalism.

When R. E. found out I had become a Southern Baptist he was irate. Little did I know that my fate would be the same. I would follow him “outside,” to live with great sorrow for having entered the Baptist Bubble in my own ministry. But that’s a story to be shared later . . .

He arranged for his expository teaching to be transcribed by shorthand and printed into leaflets and books. In addition, he wrote a complete song book (words and music) and scores of poems. His daily devotional Gems of Gold, the Wells of Living Water set, his commentary on Revelation and multivolume commentary on the whole Bible are now collector's items. His entire works number over 300 items, including pamphlets.

He did indeed cover the earth with his ministry. He also pioneered Christian radio in Chicago in 1926 with companion Paul Rader. The Union Gospel Press in Cleveland, his publisher, gave him a free apartment to use when he was not speaking somewhere.

As my father was finishing Wheaton College and active with his father in the radio broadcasting activity, his mother Nellie passed away. Dad was 19. It was then R. E. left the radio ministry and created city wide protracted crusades. In Western Canada, conducting a crusade with his son Charles, he met and married Alma. She was exactly 2 years older than my father! From then on they were inseparable, traveling the world until his death when I was 14 years of age.

I recall a visit to our home at age 11 when he visited us. Knowing I wanted to be a preacher, he assigned me to prepare a sermon outline for a passage in Isaiah 73. When I brought it to him, he carefully read it through and alliterated each point. I treasured that scrap of paper for years, lost now . . .

After preaching on Heaven in Buffalo, New York, he boarded a sleeper train to Cleveland. He had said, "I am looking for the Undertaker or the Uptaker." He was found dead in the morning at the end of his trip.



My parents were on their honeymoon. Ruth May Zimmerman was 19, Ralph Webster Neighbour was 21. The year was 1928, the month was June. The wedding took place in a small anthracite coal town, Shamokin, Pennsylvania. Their first residence would be the parsonage of the Baptist Church in Paw Paw, Michigan, Ralph's first Pastorate.

I was delivered by a midwife on April 1, 1929, in that parsonage kitchen. One might say I was a honeymoon baby! I was named after my father, thus nicknamed "Junior" for years (ugh!).

Here's how they met:

My father Ralph had graduated from Wheaton College and was traveling as part of his father's R. E. Neighbour Evangelistic Crusade, playing the clarinet and whistling bird calls to the hymn *His Eye Is on The Sparrow*. His oldest brother Charles played the trombone and led the music. His sister Marie played the piano. Older brother Robert played the Viola d' Amour (a rare eight-stringed violin). A family team!

The Shamokin Crusade protracted for a month, typical for that period. Sponsoring churches borrowed lumber from the local supplier and erected the tabernacle for the event, usually seating 1,000 people who sat on board seats. The first weeks were filled with music and convicting sermons by R. E. Only when deep conviction began to fall, perhaps halfway through, would an invitation begin for professing salvation. Whole regions were impacted as a result.

The month allowed time for the Team to be entertained by citizens of the area. H. A. Zimmerman had a jewelry store at 36 N. Market Street and provided watches and jewelry at cost to preachers. There was a good reason for the Team to shop there! In addition, Carrie Zimmerman was a great Pennsylvania Dutch cook, as well as a good saleswoman. She insisted the group climb the stairs to the apartment above to store and enjoy special dishes.

Thus, daughter Ruth met Ralph. It was love at first sight. By the close of the meetings the love bug had bitten powerfully. As the crusades moved from town to town, letters flew back and forth. Then an engagement ring (bought at wholesale) flew from the store's safe onto Ruth's ring finger in preparation for the wedding date. Long distance courtship led up to the marriage from later Crusades.

"Maw Maw" (Grandmother) came to Paw Paw to assist Ruth with the new baby. Months later, the young couple took their vacation and started the six-hundred-mile trip to visit Ruth's parents in a Model A Ford. After journeying for a short distance, the couple realized each one had assumed the other had

put little Ralph Junior in his crib on the back seat. In a panic, they realized he had been left behind! Returning, they found he had awakened from his nap and was happily chewing on his white leather shoe.

Evidently the Michigan church was too far from Ruth's parents. When the Northumberland Baptist church became pastorless a year later, my father accepted the call and the couple moved to a new parsonage, only 18.7 miles away from Paw Paw and Maw Maw. This is where my memories begin.

That parsonage sat behind the stone church, connected by a grassy yard. The street in front sloped from the church on the corner down a hill to the colliery where a deafening whistle blew each morning to wake the miners, living or dead! I enjoyed standing on the lowest rung of the fence in front of the house and waving to the coal miners who walked past, carrying their lunch buckets with carbide lamps on their helmets. I even learned some of their names.

When I was three, my little brother David Eugene was born. We slept in the same bedroom at the top of the stairs. Across from our room was Daddy's little study with a rocking chair that creaked as he studied his Bible by the hour.

We had an ice box that was filled with blocks of ice a few times a week. I recall swinging on the lower door and crashing it on my toes. (Strange how a traumatic experience is recalled!)

Young Ralph Sr. was a powerful preacher and many converts appeared. Nevertheless, the woman treasurer refused to pay him his \$5 weekly salary if he preached beyond noon – which frequently took place! He stubbornly refused to ask her for his salary, going instead to the little mountain adjacent to the town and coming back with rabbits and squirrels. I have many memories of watching him skin them on the back porch and playing with the dried animal skins. Mother would cut dandelion leaves for salad.

Each Sunday, Ruth's parents would visit us. At the visit's close, Paw Paw would excuse himself to get another drink of water in the kitchen. My parents would rush to the sugar bowl to see how much cash he had left!

I still remember how my parents would spell words at the table when discussing people in the church. I was usually able to figure out anyway what was going on. One woman was doing everything possible to get my dad fired. This worried me until Dad said, "Junior, God is my protector; don't worry about her." One Sunday I was with other children meeting in our living room during the Sunday School hour.

Suddenly men entered carrying this woman. She had fainted sitting in her classroom. Men carried her to our living room, placing her on our mohair-covered couch. Soon she went into spasms and her high heels tore holes in the couch as rigor mortis set in. I must have been close to five years old. I instantly remembered the story Dad had preached about Ananias and Saphira and tied God's judgment to the incident.

Dad started a radio broadcast on a local station, and I would lie on the floor in front of our large radio with dials to hear him. This brought him to the attention of the Chaplain at the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary, inviting him to lead a Bible study for the inmates. He sometimes took me with him to the chapel where he taught. As I had done with the coal miners at our front fence, I did with the inmates. I can remember how they would encourage me to tell them "stories," while the service was being rehearsed. Like all little children, I must have had a vivid imagination.

One time when Maw Maw was visiting, I am told I would stand a few steps high on the stairs and preach about the "bootiful boo sky!" When asked what I was doing, I said, "I'se gonna be a peecher like my Daddy. I'se a peecher now, but I just can't peeche!" I share this because my entire life has been spent knowing God's Presence.

At the age of four, David and I contracted painful Trench Mouth. Swelling pain put both of us in bed. A doctor's visit to our home produced a prescription to be filled; the cost was more than Dad had. By faith he went to the drug store and stood in line. A businessman tapped him on the shoulder saying, "You do not know me, but I want to give you this money." It was more than needed for the prescription! Dad had many examples of the Lord providing in his young ministry.

At age 5, I would sit with my mother on the front row of the church. Dad was a dramatic storyteller as he preached. I often was caught up in his acting the parts of Bible characters. On a Sunday night as he portrayed Christ dying for my sin, I sensed a deep conviction for the first time: I had entered my stage of accountability.

During the invitation, I whispered to mother that I wanted to accept the appeal for those who wanted to be converted. Because of my age, she whispered we would talk to Daddy at home about it. I reluctantly agreed. I recall waiting and waiting for him while he stayed after the service for a meeting. Mother put my pajamas on, and I waited anxiously for him to arrive. I think Mother must have prepared him when he came in, because he was sitting in his rocking chair in his little study when I was led there. I climbed on his lap, and he gently led me to pray to receive Jesus into my heart. I went to sleep with the joy of knowing I had made my greatest decision of my life.

I awoke still excited about what had happened. As soon as Mother dressed me, I went to my usual spot on the fence in front of the house to greet the coal miners. "Hey, Mister! I've accepted Jesus! My sins are forgiven!" Occasionally one would smile, most ignored me. It didn't matter – I had to tell the only audience I had available.

That evening, Mr. Sholvin, black-faced with coal dust, knocked on the parsonage door, asking for my father. He explained that as he worked digging coal, he saw my shining face saying my sins had been forgiven, and how could he have that done for himself? Thus, the Holy Spirit had used my little testimony to bring a sinner to repentance. We never know what a witness will do when the Holy Spirit uses it to convict others.



Between Dad's sermons and Mother reading bedtime Hurlbut's Bible Stories, I also had another special teacher: Paw Paw Zimmerman. Mother, David and I would spend many days at a time in the little apartment above the Shamokin jewelry store. At night I would either sleep on the couch in the living room or curl up with Great Grandma (Alvin's mother) in the third bedroom. I would observe Paw Paw as he would lie on his side in the bed in early morning, studying his Bible on a stool pulled out from beneath the bed. Habitually, from 4 a.m. until time to stoke the furnace, he studied both the Bible and Clarence Larkin's Dispensational Truth. (He also kept several copies of the Schofield Reference Bible and Larkin's book under the cash register in the jewelry store.) I received a copy of each when I was five from there and literally learned to read from studying them.

Hours were spent in the evenings in the watch repair workroom, sitting in my pajamas. As he repaired a watch with the eyeglass on his right eye and his Bible spread on the desk, he led me to cherish the scriptures. "Junior, do you know John 3:16? Yes. But I have looked at every 3:16 verse in every book of the Bible! They are all filled with important information. Turn to Genesis 3:15!" There he taught me about the *protevangelium*. There was not a Bible book he had not studied for decades.

Paw Paw never formally graduated from high school, sent by his farmer father Isaiah to be apprenticed to a Jewish watchmaker. He spoke Yiddish as well as Pennsylvania Dutch. He would smile as Philadelphia Jewish salesmen came to sell diamonds and while negotiating would speak Yiddish, discussing about how to cheat "Zimmie." They never knew he knew.

He introduced me to more than scripture. He taught me how to witness. I would sit on the steps leading up to the apartment watching him in the Diamond Room, displaying settings and diamonds to

couples selecting engagement rings. Before the close of the deal, he always pulled out the Bible from the ledge under the cushioned table and showed them the plan of salvation. Scores were led to Christ in that way. Occasionally a couple would be embarrassed and decline to purchase. It did not bother him, but his wife Carrie would frustratingly say, "Alvin! Get the money first!" Souls were his highest priority.

At age six, he said, "Junior, today we are going to a brush arbor, meeting people who believe you can become sinless." As we left the back of the store, he picked a rose and placed it on his coat with a hatpin. We drove into Peter's Mountain in his car (with freewheeling to save gas going downhill) and stopped at the brush arbor. We sat on board seats supported by concrete blocks in the very center of the group. Testimony time began. The man seated in front of us stood to his feet: "I want to testify I haven't sinned in 20 years!" As he droned on, Paw Paw winked at me and pulled the hatpin from his coat, jabbing it squarely into his rear end. "OUCH!" He whirled around to see Paw Paw smiling, holding the hatpin for him to see. He said, "You rascal! Why did you do that?" Paw Paw solemnly stood and spoke: "Brothers and Sisters, please pray for this brother who has sinned by losing his temper after 20 years! Come on, Junior, we must be going . . ."

Mother's younger brother Roy had climbed fool's hill as a teenager, fathering a child and had to marry the girl. As a child I worried about him, the black sheep in the Zimmerman family. I would ask Paw Paw why he did not cut him off as he drank and partied with his electrician union friends. He would always repeat, "Leave him to Papa." That phrase has stuck like glue with me through most events of my lifetime. When I have forgotten that advice, I have always paid the price of trying to settle what only Papa can settle.

There were many things Paw Paw had to leave to Papa God. He apprenticed others to learn the watch repair trade. Two extra stations in the work room were provided for workers. One of them was Web Derk, husband of my mother's sister Mary. He remained faithful, but a nephew named Jay worked at the third station until he mastered the craft and then moved right across the street and opened a store in direct competition. I shall never forget how Paw Paw said, "Leave him to Papa!" This made an indelible impact on my own life that has carried me through my ministry. Rather than being angry at things we cannot change, it is best to remember that God is in charge of everything.

The Workroom in the back of the jewelry store also launched my theological training. Paw Paw had given me an old clock to take apart and reassemble with my own special repair spot on the middle of the floor. During business hours as I tinkered, various Pastors from different denominations would wander in to debate theological questions, sometimes with great emotions. Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostals sought to convert each other. Of particular dispute was the issue of the eternal security of the believers. The Baptist Pastor really had that one down! He convinced me for sure that I had nothing to worry about. The Pentecostal Pastor had his own views about the baptism of the Holy Spirit that led me to have many private discussions with Paw Paw after he left. These were moments when Clarence Larkin's charts were also often consulted as a follow-up to the Pastor's debates. I was also made aware of pre- and post-millennial views, knowing my grandfather R. E. Neighbour had written powerful defenses for the pre-millennial view. Against all odds, I have staunchly remained in the pre-millennial, pre-tribulation camp, despite graduating (with Greek and Hebrew) from an Amillennial seminary. I also am looking for the Uptaker or the Undertaker.

When Maw Maw Zimmerman died, I was attending seminary and flew to Shamokin for her funeral. People lined up in the snow for two blocks to pass by her coffin and pay respect. Her ministry to the poor families of coal miners stretched through a half century; she was dearly loved!

The death of Paw Paw Zimmerman was one of the most tragic events of my life. On a cold winter day, he went to the basement, as he had done for generations, to fire up the coal furnace. He evidently

tossed gasoline into the furnace to get the fire started. It exploded, shooting fire into the room, catching the wood beams above on fire. In a panic, Paw Paw tried to beat out the fire with his coat. He also caught on fire and was horribly burned. His glasses melted into his face; his back received fourth-degree burns. The entire store and apartment above went up in flames, nothing saved!

The store safe, containing diamonds, watches, and other valuables, was open at the time. Volunteer fireman helped themselves and let the fire rage. Little was done to stop the inferno.

At the time, I was planting the Valley Baptist church in the Harrisburg area and rushed to Shamokin. The highway to the city approaches the city from a mountain top. From there, I saw nothing but black smoke from the fire. Paw Paw was rushed to a hospital in Sunbury where we watched him suffer in agony for seven days before he perished. As I pen these words 60 years later, my heart continues to ache in sorrow that such a godly man endured such an agonizing end. "Leave it to Papa . . .

Papa God came through for Uncle Roy. After the death of Paw Paw, both he and his wife Irene became devoted followers of Christ.



While still pastoring in Northumberland, Pennsylvania my father was very much involved in the ministry of R. E. Neighbour. He had accepted the call of the First Baptist Church in Elyria, Ohio in 1919 when Dad was 12 years old.

His first wife Nellie served at his side as he gradually began to be absent from the pulpit to preach and teach everywhere in America. In February of 1922 he taught in the famous Moody Church in Chicago. Soon his busy schedule caused his title to change from Senior Pastor to Acting Pastor. So powerful was his preaching that the church permitted him to move in and out at will, anxious not to lose him.

In July of 1934 my father spent a full month filling the Elyria pulpit. In 1935 we moved to Elyria where he became Associate Pastor. The congregation responded well to the messages of my father, freeing up even more the international opportunities being offered to R. E.

For me, moving to our new residence was an amazing experience. The church had purchased a massive pre-Civil War mansion on East Avenue. We moved into the second floor. The first floor was constructed to be a palace with the finest woods and stained-glass windows, massive fireplaces and many rooms. It was called the Sunday School Annex. Especially at night it was a scary place for a barely 6-year-old boy! A winding wide staircase ascended to the second floor. To the right facing the street was the church office, complete with secretary and library space for my father. To the left was a luxurious apartment for our little family. The massive property included a four-car garage with apartment above and a wonderful cherry tree which could be climbed to pick the delicious fruit.

It bordered at the back onto the Black River where when frozen was used by all to ice skate. Because the river wound around to Franklin Grade School, it provided a wonderful way for a first grader to go back and forth in the wintertime.

So many childhood memories are attached to this property. Among them was the intimate observation of the passion my father had for the lost.

A thin wall separated my bedroom from my father's office. I began to hear a clicking sound at night coming from there. I walked into the office and found my father pressing a Morse Code sending device. When I asked him what he was doing he said, "Junior, I have met a man who needs Jesus and he rejects Him at this time. I discovered he is an amateur radio operator. So, in my evenings I am practicing sitting for a license. Then he and I will become close friends."

Cultivation evangelism was not taught by him to me, it was caught by me from him. I saw that man not only follow Christ but become a deacon in the church.

As I entered the first grade, my life revolved around all the exciting activities taking place at the First Baptist Church. It had hundreds of members and many children my age. In my Sunday school class were two cousins who sat on either side of me. They explained their mothers would not allow them to speak to each other; they were daughters fighting bitterly over the distribution of the family inheritance. I became an intermedate, sitting between them in the class, passing messages back and forth. It was a situation that went on for months.

Less than a year after we arrived on a Sunday night father and R. E. (my grandfather) were seated on the platform during the song service when an usher presented R. E. with a cable from Prague, Czechoslovakia. Two godly women wrote that through prayer they were told to call him to preach the gospel in their city and a mighty movement of God would begin. He handed the cable to my father and said, "God has called me to do this. As of now you are the Pastor here; I shall depart in the morning."

And so, he did. A powerful movement of the Holy Spirit broke out there, requiring several services every day to care for all the people who came to be taught and converted. During one of those weeks R. E. was injured by a streetcar and broke his leg. He continued to preach from a cot on the platform!

My father established a daily radio broadcast at that time called Morning Sunshine, broadcast on WEOL. It would continue for more than a half century and later receive an award as the longest continual Christian radio broadcast in America. From him I learned early to involve myself in Christian radio and had several different broadcasts throughout my ministry, including Coffee Break and Dinner Bell in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (WDAC) and for 18 years Carpool in Houston (KHCB).

He did something else soon after we moved to Elyria: he purchased a small stone cottage close to Gull Lake, Michigan, 120 miles away. My grade school summers were spent swimming, fishing, and catching turtles. Dad would drive up Sunday nights and spend a day or two. I was taken to nearby Battle Creek to visit the Post breakfast cereal plant more than once.

Surrounding the lake were fields covered with grapevines. I must have been six years old when I decided to take a walk through the fields, only to lose track of how to get back. After about an hour of wandering, I became panicked. I began to pray! Until then my nightly prayers had little to do with asking God to help me with anything, asking Him to bless primarily family members. I only realized later in my life that this unforgettable experience was the Lord's way of maturing my understanding of desperate praying.

As I cried and prayed with fear, a collie dog came running to me from the grapevines. I said to him, "Take me home!" I have no idea if he understood me, but he turned around and begin to walk in a specific direction. Occasionally he sat down and waited for me until I caught up with him. He led me to a road, perhaps a quarter of a mile from where I met him. In a few moments a car appeared. I frantically waved it down and an elderly couple gladly took me home. Mother had been looking for me everywhere and made me promise I would never wander off again! And I never did.

That childhood memory has never left me as the years have passed. I can no longer count the number of times, facing far more serious circumstances I have entered into desperate prayer, assured my God will direct me!

A loving God also allowed a seven-year-old boy to experience a mighty movement of the Holy Spirit. In 1938 Albert Peterson was invited to preach in our church nightly for a month. He had served as the masseur for the famous Billy Sunday during his campaigns. I sat on the front row every night with my mother for that month. He did not preach with drama and fire like my father and that disappointed me. But he had a compassionate way about him that endeared him to everyone, and the auditorium remained packed with members of the congregation.

The final Sunday evening came. With tears of compassion streaming down his cheeks he begged the congregation to repent of all grudges, resentments, and bitterness. I could feel the power of the spirit moving across the auditorium as the message developed.

Professor Holden went to play softly on the organ as the invitation was offered by my father. Hardly had we started to sing when, observing the audience as he played, the organ went silent! He was seeing a powerful event unfolding.

A miracle was taking place. The two sisters who had not spoken for months to each other, sitting on opposite sides of the room, simultaneously stepped into the aisles to come forward to confess their hatred of one another. The heaviest stronghold in the congregation had just been broken! As they embraced at the front of the audience weeping with sorrow, their husbands and children joined them, all sobbing as they finally made up with each other. This was followed by testimony after testimony as people confessed resentment and bitterness aloud. People would stand to their feet, confess, sit down, to be replaced over and over by individuals and couples all filled with repentance. At 11 P.M. my mother took David and me home to bed.

Back at the church the service continued until 2 A.M. At that time the deacons met with my father and requested that the meeting continue. Albert Peterson was unable to remain, and my father agreed to lead the church each night for the foreseeable future. Crowds gathered so large that all the rooms in the basement of the church were filled with people listening through loudspeakers. It was then decided that the pulpit would be placed on the porch of the church facing the huge square city park, loudspeakers would be installed, and the meeting would continue. Soon the park was filled, and the huge auditorium became a counseling center for Converse and repentant Christians. Policemen were called to direct traffic.

One policeman approached my father at the end of a service for a private discussion. He confessed he had just surrendered his life to Christ and had to face the reality that he had been taking bribes. Dad took him to see the governor who congratulated the man for being repentant but refused to pardon him. Unforgettable to me is the moment I stood holding my father's fingers with my little hand as we joined a group of people singing God Be With You 'Till We Meet Again as he boarded a train handcuffed to an officer, enroute to the state prison. I believe my memory serves me correctly that he was later ordained by my father and became a Pastor in California. Research showed he died in 1978 in Escondido, California and my father preached his funeral sermon.

I cannot express how important that experience was for impacting my understanding of how God could break through barriers to change lives. The DNA of the Neighbour family includes a large dose of compassion for the lost and a desire to see the body of Christ expand through the mighty power of God.



In 1940 the next transition took place for our family. R. G. Letourneau formed a ministry to open closed churches in New York State. Harold Strathearn opened an office in Rockefeller Center in New York City and retained my father to be an evangelist to open closed churches and preach until a congregation existed. This was a unique form of church planting! Letourneau funds supported several evangelists who began the revising of 100 dead churches, closed by liberal theology that rejected salvation truth.

For my parents to sort things out as we left Elyria, it was decided Mother, David and I would move into the Zimmerman apartment above the jewelry store in Shamokin. This was a wonderful time, when once again I came under the mentoring of Paw Paw. I also finally became a friend of Uncle Roy Zimmerman. He took me with him as he wired and repaired electric issues in old houses. He still

smoked and drank, and I went into the bars with him. Nevertheless, I did have respect for him as a hard-working man. At this time, I also attended a Shamokin school primarily comprised of students who had little to do with God, and much to do with sex and drinking.

In about six months, we moved to our new residence in Glen Rock, New Jersey. This was a village with train tracks leading to Grand Central Station. Father was gone most of the time, traveling with a four-man quartet from South Carolina. Although my brother David was not old enough, I was allowed to take the train to Grand Central Station and then transfer to a train that would take me to the city upstate where father would be camped for weeks at a time. He would meet my train and I would move into his room where I learned to play chess. I enjoyed these weekend trips tremendously and saw God work powerfully as dead churches would come alive. Trips to the office in Rockefeller Center and riding the commuter train in those days was considered totally safe. I was only 13 at the time!

Tragedy struck our home. David, eight years old, was riding his bicycle playing cops and robbers with the boy who lived in the house behind us. As he chased Melvyn they came to the end of the block and Melvyn made a quick right turn cutting across the railroad tracks. As David chased him, the street was filled with the rapidly moving wheels of a train engine who caught his shirt and pants and whirled him over and over for many feet before dropping him on the side of the tracks. Every bone on the right side of his body had been broken at least once.

Melvyn arrived on his bicycle screaming that David had been hit by the train. Mother heard him through the kitchen window where she was cooking supper, I frantically rode my bike to the scene while she ran on foot.

Who was that little body, full of blood and screams stretched out on the track? Could it possibly be my little brother? My first childish response was to send Melvyn back to tell my mother not to come because he was so horribly injured!

Still wearing her apron, she arrived. So did a police car. It was determined we had no time to wait for an ambulance to come from Ridgewood. The police chief and I climbed in the back seat. He held David in his arms, and we rushed with siren blaring to a faraway hospital in Paterson. While mother stayed with David in the emergency room, I found myself alone in the waiting room hearing his screams, wondering if I would ever play with him again.

Meanwhile, my father had been notified at his office in Rockefeller Center. A few hours later, he arrived. By then, the physicians felt David would die quickly and hesitated to treat the many broken bones. They reported nearly every bone on the right side of his body was broken at least one time.

It was established his kidney had been ruptured and that alone might cause his quick death. As I watched my parents deal with the situation, I understood they were compiling a list of people and churches who would be alerted to pray for David. It was automatic! They were putting into practice what father had preached everywhere. If my little brother would live, it would take a miracle.

Eventually, my parents returned to our home on Harding Road to drop me off and return to the hospital. A kind family living in the house beside us took care of me.

They gave me a bedroom that overlooked the side of our house next door. I sat on the window seat, looking across the driveway at David's bedroom window, praying, praying, weeping. He was only eight and I was 11. He was dying and I was frightened.

Something happened unexpectedly that astonished me. I did not hear a voice, and I did not see a vision: instead, I sensed a powerful Presence in that room with me, the Presence of God Himself! It was not fleeting; it remained for a long period of time. I felt comforted, reassured that God would surely enter this situation! To my own amazement I was able to go to sleep. I cannot express the impact that encounter had in preparing me for my future ministry.

I remember the constant flow of communication by telephone to hundreds of people as my mother and father remained at the bedside. The doctors waited, either for death or change.

We were told that if the liver did not recover there would be no sense in dealing with broken bones. Thus, the prayer teams everywhere focused on that single issue. After four days of waiting, the liver began to function. Then a large team of doctors scheduled all the surgeries required to repair the many broken bones. David would be put into casts that sometimes covered his whole body except his head. He would spend one full year in the hospital, and I would visit him scores of times.

At the end of a year, we were allowed to take him home. He was now nine years old. So much attention had been given to him by the nurses and doctors that he had become spoiled. Very demanding, almost like an infant, he would scream at the top of his voice if he did not get his way. It was particularly hard on my mother, who lovingly attended him as best she could. It was decided they would have to ride it out no matter how long it took.

I found it difficult to relate to him during this time. It was God's teaching experience for me. I was learning to look beyond circumstances and sense the real needs in a person suffering in ways I knew nothing about. David was not a spoiled brat. He was a frightened spirit, crying for help - not for his mending body, but for his broken soul.

Six months later, wearing special corrective shoes, David was taken for his progress to be evaluated by his Jewish surgeon. When asked to raise his arms, he nonchalantly rotated them fully. When asked to stroll across the room, he walked with no limp. The doctor's eyes filled with tears. He said to my father, "I have experienced a miracle before my eyes this day!"

My brother is with the Lord now. He lived faithfully for his Lord, operating a Christian bookstore in retirement. He devoured every book he could find on Heaven after he was diagnosed with terminal prostate cancer. I spent three days fellowshipping with him just before he went to be with Christ.

The period we lived in Glen Rock, New Jersey was a time I learned the cost of being a Christian in a godless society. Our family had Christian values that clashed with the culture. The Junior High School I attended insisted that everyone had to learn to dance. Unfortunately, my parents felt any form of dancing led to immorality and I had to refuse. I chose not to participate in BB-gun gang wars, in hazing other students, in after school fighting matches.

Because of these matters, my classmates nicknamed me "Rabbi." Several waited to beat me up every night as I left the school playground. I mean, every night! It became so constant that I asked to remain in the school for a period after dismissal, so they would get tired of waiting in the woods to beat me up.

As a result, I retreated into the basement of my home. I set up a chemical laboratory. I also began to build gas-powered model airplanes. I read endless books.

My weekends were different. I would often take a commuter train on Friday, traveling to New York City's Grand Central Station. I would board trains to be with my father in upstate New York. This became the focus of my life. When those 3 ½ years ended and my father accepted a call to Pastor the Fort Wayne Gospel Temple in Indiana, I happily shook the dust of Glen Rock off my feet.



The Fort Wayne Gospel Temple was one of the largest in America in 1944. Its auditorium seated 3,000 people. It published a newspaper using its own printing presses, had a Missionary Training School with fields in Cuba and Santo Domingo. The church broadcast nationally an hour-long Back Home Hour every Sunday night on clear channel WOWO. A full band and choir were accompanied by a theater organ. A sophisticated radio control room transcribed each program on glass discs.

Keller Bush was the Engineer. He took a shine to me and trained me to run the equipment. At 14, I entered a brand new, exciting world! This wonderful church with a vision to evangelize the world, impacted me as I entered South Side High School. It was located just a block east of the massive Temple building.

The church also sponsored The Downtown Mission on Calhoun Street's skid row. Rocky, a former alcoholic and circus clown, met me soon after we arrived.

He learned I was longing to preach. When he told me he needed a preacher to fill a vacancy every Thursday night, I jumped at the chance. My first sermon as a 14-year-old lasted only ten minutes. Gradually, they stretched to twenty. They were presented to 50 or 60 bleary street men who came primarily for the snacks that followed the service. Every sermon was an appeal for salvation. A multitude of illustrations from my father's sermons were dramatically repeated.

I shall never forget the first man who surrendered to Christ after a message. Rocky gently took him to a room backstage and gave him coffee, laced with black pepper, to sober him up. Rocky told me to observe how he would help this man choose true repentance.

He began to draw out the story of the alcoholic's life. Gradually he poured out his heart, sharing details of his downward spiral until he was a bucket of tears. Repentance was authentic at that point. Later, Rocky helped me understand how he would continue to reinforce the decision by having him come to a daytime meeting held for new converts. This was my first lesson about follow-up ministry.

One night when I arrived to preach, Rocky said, "Well, son, what is your subject tonight?" I said emphatically, "Tonight I am going to preach on **hell!**"

After a pause he said, "I don't think you are ready to present that message yet. I thought he was saying I was too young to do so, but that was not the case.

He continued, "I'll go without you to the platform and begin to lead the song service. You stay back here and think about what will happen to these men when they die and go to hell. Pray until your heart is broken over that. Then come out and preach."

Whew! This man had lived in a world I had no knowledge of, and he knew I could do great damage if my message was not moved by a broken heart.

In that back room, I recalled the account of the famous Billy Sunday who went from factory to factory all day long preaching the message of Christ. The news reporters followed him at the end of the afternoon to his room for a press conference. One asked him, "Billy, why do you push yourself so hard all day long? We can hardly keep up with you!" Pulling off his tie, he went to the window of the room, threw up the sash, looking below at all the people walking in the street below. Summoning them over to look, he said, "Look at all those people. How many of them will die without hearing that Christ died for them? Get out of my way! Let me go!" He rushed to the elevator to reach the street. They observed him standing in front of the hotel preaching the gospel to the passersby in his shirt sleeves.

The Lord did break my heart in that back room. Because of Rocky, that broken heart remained with me for the rest of my ministry.

I count those years in my high school days preaching at the Downtown Mission as "Boot Camp Training" for what God knew I needed for the future.



Winona Lake Bible Conference was a short drive from Fort Wayne. I often visited it with youth groups from our church. We went to hear R. G. Le Tourneau speak. I had met him many times when my father worked for his ministry in New York.

Before the service, I walked up to greet him. We laughed together about the time he had purchased and delivered a motorcycle to our home in Glen Rock. I was only 10 years old. My father refused delivery of it!

He insisted that I come to the stage and sit beside him as he prepared to speak. After we were seated, he reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a check, not even in an envelope. Smiling, he said, "Look what God has just given to me!"

The check was made out to his company from the Caterpillar Corporation for \$18 million. It was a payment for one of his many inventions. Of course, he then told his audience about the fact that 90% of it would go to the work of the Lord. He lived on 10% of his earnings all his life and gave 90% to the Lord's work.

One of the most important things aside from my conversion experience took place in that Billy Sunday tabernacle with a sawdust floor. I was attending a missionary conference at age 14. I had already started to speak at the Downtown Mission and was thinking about what I would do next to serve my Lord.

Ruth Stull had come from the jungles of Ecuador to challenge young people to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel message. I was profoundly moved by her appeal. I went forward that night to kneel and covenant that I would give my life as a missionary.

For all the years that followed, I lived with that vision, that eventually I would be going overseas to help bring in the kingdom of God. I began to see China as a field needing Christ. I even cut out a picture of a Chinese child and pasted it in the flyleaf of my Bible. I wrote these words below it: "He died for me?"

I had no way of knowing the twists and turns that would finally take me to a global ministry, touching every continent on the face of the earth. I only knew from that point forward that my purpose in life had been confirmed on my knees in the Billy Sunday Tabernacle in Winona Lake.



When I was 14, Mother gave birth to my sister Carol Jane. She instantly became spoiled by her older brothers who adored her. I shall never forget when she became about six years old and contracted Bell's palsy how burdened we were for her. Fortunately, the treatments given to her set her free from what could have been a lifetime problem. She has been gifted with teaching and counseling, presently with unwed pregnant girls.



In spring of 1945, R. E. Neighbour, my grandfather, passed away, just as school ended for the summer. This brought the Neighbour family together for his funeral. All his sons spoke, and the choir sang the Halleluiahs Chorus. It was a powerful remembrance of the family patriarch.

Charles, my uncle, was living in California at the time. He spoke with my father about taking me back with him for the summer, to work with youth in his itinerant ministry. It was agreed. We boarded a train headed nonstop for Los Angeles. We had a sleeper compartment. It was amazing to see the west for the first time through the window.

When we arrived at his home, we worked together to install a sprinkler system in his yard. To reward me, he arranged for me to spend several days with a doctor friend in Huntington Beach. He had a daughter my age named Millie. We enjoyed each other, surfing and listening to classical music. I confess she became more interested in me than I in her, but I totally admired her brilliant father. I think we may have kissed once or twice. She continued to write and I wrote back, not aware it would ever amount to anything.

Charles and Mildred had a Buick, towing a House trailer. The story of his current ministry was explained to me. He had conducted services with Mildred playing the marimba for a small church in Ottumwa, Iowa, population less than 25,000 people.

Walking down the shaded street in front of the hardware store, he met Martin Potratze, the wealthiest man in town. Charles spoke lovingly to him and invited him to hear him preach. This man was soundly converted. He then made a proposition to Charles. If he would be willing to limit his ministry only to small towns shunned by great preachers, he would fully subsidize his ministry! This lasted for several years.

That was how I spent my summer, living in the trailer in parking lots next to small buildings. Our first stop was a small town in Kansas and our second stop was in Hearne, Texas. People flocked to watch 16 mm. movies of the holy land, hear a marimba played and be convicted by a powerful sermon.

I had opportunity to conduct youth meetings for young people and saw many converts. I could not know at the time that it was part of God's equipping school for my future ministry.

It was April 12, 1948. I was shooting baskets with my friend Dwight Bieberich in the lot between our houses on McKinney Circle in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

My father drove up in his car and skidded to a halt, shouting through the window, "Get in quick!" As we sped away, he said, "President Roosevelt has just died and WOWO does not know what to broadcast as this news catches the nation.

"I have been asked to fill the radio time until they figure out what to do. I want you to fire up our link to the station in the Control Room. I have already called the team to come to sing and play. I will prepare poems and scriptures to mingle with music for whatever time is necessary."

This began a four-hour broadcast that I recorded on the glass discs used at that time. I recall how his voice broke as he read the poem *Oh, Captain! My Captain!* Verses written by R. E. Neighbour from *Gems of Gold* saved the day as the hours dragged on.



Two significant people influenced my life during those high school years. The first one was Nate Saint. He was an airman at Baer Field Army base. I met him at the private airport where my father kept a two-seat Aeronca Chief airplane. He used it fly it to Youth for Christ meetings around the country. He would preach on Saturday nights and fly back in time to preach on Sunday at the Gospel Temple. I went along on many of those trips.

Nate became very active in our church. I used to go flying with him in his 40 hp Piper Cub. On one occasion that little airplane flew into a 50 mile an hour wind and actually flew backward as people on the ground pointed to us and laughed.

He was called by God to be a jungle pilot, flying missionaries through South American forests to reach unevangelized tribes.

Nate fell in love with the most beautiful girl in our church. Her father owned a string of Howard Johnson restaurants and motels across Indiana. When it became obvious to him that Nate might marry his daughter, the father told him that along with her, since he had no son, Nate would also inherit his corporation. He offered to put him on salary to be groomed for the future ownership.

When I showed up for youth meeting on a Sunday night, I found Nate waiting for me. He explained he needed to talk. I was just a high school student, but for some reason he felt I was the one to talk to about the situation.

We walked across the street to the Walgreen drugstore and sat in a booth. There he explained to me, with great sadness, that he had to make a choice. Following his tour with the Air Force, it was his goal to become a missionary pilot. He knew he could not take this beautiful but very fragile girl with him to live in jungles. She could not survive the rigors of missionary life.

Despite his love, he had to decide whether to marry her or stay on course for his life's calling. Soon after our discussion, I learned he had transferred to another air base. This precious young lady was left behind, deeply grieving.

I thought that would be the end of my contacts with him. That proved not to be so. Later, in my sophomore year at Wheaton College, he suddenly appeared in the dining hall line. I was amazed! When I asked him what he was doing, he explained he had found his life's mate who was finishing her nursing training at a nearby hospital, and he had to wait for her to graduate in a few months.

He had enrolled for one semester at Wheaton. By then, I was dating Ruth Johnston and suggested we take the girls on a double date. He rented a convertible and after picking up Ruth, we drove to the hospital to pick up Marge. When she appeared, I was surprised.

I do not know what I expected, but she was not close to matching the physical beauty of the girl he had left behind. Before the evening was over, I realized she had an inner beauty that far exceeded her physical features. She was ready for jungle life, and that is where they went. (I will return to Nate later in this story.)

The second person who impacted my life from that time, and until this very hour, is Delmar Dean Rhoads. He was two years ahead of me in High School and always stood out above other students.

At age 16 he had a booming radio voice and was the announcer for *The Back Home Hour*. He was also leader of the youth services held Sunday evenings before the main service. He always wore a suit and tie, drove a 2 door Plymouth and was official school photographer for the yearbook. I have said jokingly, "He taught me how to drive a car and kiss a girl."

Just before the Fort Wayne Gospel Temple called my father to pastor, Billy Graham, just graduating from Wheaton College, was considered for the pulpit. The search committee assigned Dean, a Sophomore in High School, to host him! (Billy Graham was rejected by the committee: he was too young for the job!)

So impressed was my father with Dean that he flew him as his associate to visit the church's missionaries in Havana, Cuba. His skills were recognized at an early age.

I followed him as announcer for *The Back Home Hour*. When he graduated from High School, he joined the Merchant Marine. Following his two years of service, he invented the first cafeteria line, manufacturing all the components in his first corporation, the Lincoln Manufacturing Company. He went on to form more than 100 corporations with factories in many states. As he became a multimillionaire, he witnessed over and over to others, explaining that John 3:16 was a contract God had provided for all men. He described it as our "ticket to heaven."

He will appear again in my future years as the financial backer of TOUCH Outreach Ministries and the constant advisor to all TOUCH Ministries developed around the world.



In Fort Wayne, David and I shared an attic space converted into a bedroom. It had a spare bed at the far end and single beds across from each other at the other end.

I made a crystal set radio out of a toilet paper tube wrapped with copper wire and a needle that touched a crystal. I would lay in bed with headphones and listen to Bob Sievers, announcer on WOWO, copying his diction.

I wanted to be a radio announcer. I read aloud many hours of newspaper articles, practicing diction and expression. Soon I got a chance on WGL Fort Wayne to do a Saturday afternoon teen show playing request pop tunes.

Because my name was the same as the Pastor of the Gospel Temple, my *nom de plume* was "Fred, fat, dumb and happy Smith." This lasted only for a short time but increased my interest in

broadcasting. Of course, all this time my father was broadcasting the weekday *Morning Sunshine*, now on several stations, in addition to the Sunday *Back Home Hour*.



While I occasionally dated during high school, I did not find any girl that interested me much until I met Ila May Olson at a Youth for Christ event. Like me, she was a preacher's kid and had blonde hair.

Since we went to different churches, we had to work out ways to meet. Most of the time, either I went to visit her at her church function, or she came with me to our church functions. Sports events were also opportunities to get together.

She was one year behind me in school. By my senior year, we were seeing each other regularly. We decided to "go steady," a term in that generation was one step before formal engagement to be married. Both families began to meet together for meals. My brother David and her brother began to fix up an old car together. Our fathers played golf together weekly.

I had been accepted to attend Wheaton College in the fall. Caught by the love bug, I suggested that perhaps when we both finished college, we should marry.

This entire affair had been conducted by me without a single thought about whether she was the girl God had for me. Everything seemed to logically fit. I hesitated to even pray about my decision before I made it. I did have misgivings about not having a solid confirmation from the Lord.

When I arrived at Wheaton, I was thrust into a high academic environment that was also very legalistic. I was required to sign a pledge not to smoke, drink alcohol, gamble, or attend movies. Because I had never done any of those things in my past, this was not a problem for me.

It soon became a problem, just because it was imposed on me. A lifestyle that had never bothered me under Grace was hard to obey under Law.

I found myself in the company of many other young men whose fathers were just as famous as mine in the church world. We began to meet off campus to smoke before attending the mandatory daily chapel service.

I took the train into Chicago where no one knew me and went to a forbidden movie. I did it because I could!

I decided that I would also try alcohol. I had never tasted a drop in my life.

I bought a hip flask of Four Roses whiskey and slipped into a nearby alley to drink it. Assuming it was consumed like a Coca-Cola, I swigged the whole bottle empty. The world became a brand-new place for me, one I did not enjoy at all.

I barely made it back to my room at Wheaton College. Mark Diller from Ohio was my roommate, a chap with a mustache who knew the ways of the world. When he learned what I had done, he laughed and said, "You fool! You mix your drinks!"

The next time I wanted to rebel, I took the train to Aurora instead of Chicago to "mix my drinks." I mixed beer with wine and shots of whiskey and gin. Before the train arrived to take me back to college, I had emptied my stomach completely.

From that time on, I realized I could not handle liquor. I doubt if the previous generations of Neighbours had ever touched a drop. My constitution was not prepared for Demon Alcohol!

I played soccer with missionary kids. Through chatting with them, I learned much about missionary life. They brought out the other side of me that had surrendered for missions at age 14. I would join them in prayer for China or India. Being double minded at this point, I ran with two distinctively different crowds within the college body.

I also joined the cross-country track team. Gill Dodds was our coach. He held the world record for running the fastest quarter mile in history. An unforgettable moment happened when I came into the

last lap with my legs cramping, ready to quit. This famous man quickly came to run beside to pace me, saying “Come on Ralph, it’s too soon to quit!”

The words “It’s too soon to quit!” was to become a lifelong reminder of how the Holy Spirit comes alongside us to help in time of trouble. I later had the phrase set into a plate to sit on my desk.

The College speech department launched a radio station, WHON, covering the campus. I joined it as an announcer as one of my extracurricular activities. There I met Ed McCulley, son of a wealthy businessman. He was about the only student who owned his own car. He also had a perfect radio announcing voice.

He was preparing himself for the mission field, declining his father’s offer to take over a wealthy corporation. We chatted together about our common calling to the mission field, neither aware of future events that would cause his martyrdom in the jungles of Ecuador.

I had huge inner conflicts that first year: smoking with the PKs (Preacher’s kids) and circulating with the MK’s meant I had to live a double life. At the time I had no idea how God was sandpapering me. My future ministry would be destroyed if this doublemindedness remained. It would not be completely ended for some time, but this was the starting time for my cleansing of this flaw – a time when no one was yet influenced by my ministry.

In chapel, Stephen Olford taught from Romans 7:15, “For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” He had my attention! That was me!

Satan had trapped me into being double minded in ways never experienced when living at home. I came under deep conviction. I was rooming in Bartlett Hall, where my father has stayed when he attended college.

The inner turmoil would continue for almost two years before the Spirit of God won out. He had planted a mature upper-class student at Bartlett who was quietly observing my double life, patiently waiting for the right time to challenge me.

Olford was a powerful speaker. In another message, he focused on God’s primary and secondary will for our lives. He pointed his finger into the audience (I thought exactly at me!) and asked, “Where in your life are you settling for God’s second best?” A dagger pierced my heart. Ila May suddenly flooded my mind. I had never asked God if she was His best for me.

I went to my room, dropped to my knees, and asked the Lord if she was His first choice for my life partner? I struggled with His answer: it was a resounding “NO!”

What should I do? Thanksgiving holiday was approaching. I would be going home to Fort Wayne. Ila May would be waiting for me!

What would her parents and mine say if I broke off the engagement? And our two brothers? Would they also feel they would have to sever their friendships?

The first night home, I borrowed Dad’s car and picked up Ila May. We drove to a spot where we had parked many times before. On the way, I was remembering Nate’s decision years ago to wait for his God-given partner. As best I could, I shared with her that, if we married, not only would I be marrying the one God did not have for me, and she would also miss having the one God had for her. I think this helped her understand this was not the worst thing that would ever happen to her.

After she received the news, I started the engine and drove her home. She was silently weeping but said little. That night I slept very poorly. Had I really done that properly?

In the months that followed, I lived with the prayer that God would guide me to find His choice for my life partner. That summer, our family vacationed in Atlantic City. I still recall sitting in the evenings on the Boardwalk, watching all the couples holding hands walking by, wondering when would find my partner.



My second year at Wheaton began with Mark and me going to eat at the girl's cafeteria in North Hall to look over the freshman girls. In the long line in front of us was our famous football halfback Art Johnston, army vet, accompanied by the most beautiful blonde I had ever seen! "Mark!" I whispered, "I want to marry that girl!" He responded, "Fat chance. Johnston got her first."

The couple were already seated when we collected our food from the cafeteria line. Holding my tray, I walked to their table to see if I could get this girl's name.

"Hi, Art! How are you?"

"Hi, Ralph. I'd like you to meet my sister Ruthie."

I can say emphatically that at that moment I knew she was the right girl for me. I began to pursue her by asking her to go to the reception party for new students. She declined; her brother Art had arranged for Albie, center on the football team, to accompany her.

I had a competitor! There followed weeks of meeting her, getting acquainted, my falling deeper in love, her not so sure. Then there was the football banquet. Albie was her date. When she was dressed in her formal, she slipped out of the dorm to show it to me on the back steps before he picked her up.

Two-faced Ralph took the Aurora and Elgin train to a nearby town and drowned his frustration in a shot glass. It never occurred to me at the time that what God provides, He requires obedience to receive. His sandpapering of me had a way to go before I would become single minded.



I was also surprised when all the students arrived for the new school year to meet Millie Hawes, the girl I had met at age 14 in Huntington Beach, California. We had written letters rather frequently through the years. She had enrolled at UCLA for her first year but decided to transfer to Wheaton.

I met to have a soda with her in the Student Center. The conversation made it rather clear that she was thinking I might be her future husband. Embarrassed, I suggested we attend a football game together. That one date confirmed for me that I could never love anyone except my Ruthie.

I repeated the same words I had used with Ila Mae to let her down as easily as possible. After one semester she returned to UCLA.



In addition to Ruth, I also had another love: the Sunday morning Gospel Team that went by station wagon to preach in the flop houses in Chicago. These warehouses had massive floors of cots, each one wrapped in wire fencing for privacy. A night of sleep only cost a dime.

By standing a few stairsteps above each floor, I could preach to sleeping alcoholics. It was more of an adventure for me than a true ministry.

It ended poorly. After several weeks of this activity, as I finished a sermon two burly men with knives demanded I strip to my underwear and surrender all my possessions. With nothing left but my Bible I stood shivering at the front door waiting to be picked up by the station wagon. God's sandpapering continued . . .



Ruth's roommate was a girl from Fort Wayne, Indiana. At Christmas time Ruth went home with her. She met my parents and my brother, and we became more serious about our relationship. She had no idea about the other side of my personality. It was obvious we were both falling deeply in love.



My philosophy class introduced me to worldviews beyond that of Christianity. My double mindedness allowed Satan to fill my mind with doubts about what I believed.

In February of that second year in college, I decided to doubt the reality of God. In a trip to Chicago, I was confronted on the street by a student from the Moody Bible Institute who gave me a gospel tract. I proceeded to debate him from the standpoint that God did not exist. I did a pretty good job of confusing him. When it was all over, Satan caused me to gloat at my success. Like Peter who denied his Lord, I had reached a new level of carnality.

“Whom the Lord loves He chastens and scourges every son he receives.” I had grieved the Holy Spirit and my own spirit began to respond with heaviness and depression.

In late February, returning to Bartlett Hall from class, I collapsed on the front porch. God had arranged for the senior student who had been observing me to be behind me at that moment.

He helped me to my feet and took me upstairs to his room. There he became my confronter, severe and yet loving. He let me know in no uncertain terms that I was at a turning point. I had to decide which way I would live! I wept and prayed with him. The burden lifted.

I realized that I had broken the legalistic pledge of the college. I told him I felt I should go to the Dean of Men and confess my sins. Far more mature than I, he realized the legalistic system of the school at that time would mete out severe discipline. He stated there would be no grace for a confessor! He firmly advised me not to do it.

So sincere was I that I ignored his advice and went directly to Dean Fouts with a full confession. He sternly expelled me on the spot, demanding that I remove all my belongings and return to my home instantly.

I knew the gossip about me would travel like lightning to Ruth. I took the time to share my predicament with her and boarded the train to Fort Wayne.

My mother picked me up. On the way home, I broke her heart by confessing what had happened. She wept through the night. My father was preaching in Michigan at the time, so the next day we traveled to tell him about my expulsion.

For the next month I lingered at home while my father negotiated for me to be restored as a student. Upon return to the campus, I was always restricted to be either in class, cafeteria, library, or in my room at Bartlett Hall.

Art and his father instructed Ruth not to relate to me. We wrote notes back and forth but did not date. The student body treated me as though I had a disease. Being the black sheep at Wheaton College was a nightmare. I was also automatically cut off from all the other preacher's kids I had been smoking with. They were so afraid I would squeal on them that they would hardly look at me. That was a good thing!

While writing about this, I asked Ruth how she reacted when she knew of my default and her brother and father advised her to end the relationship. She shared that by this time she was deeply in love with me and knew I would turn out better than they expected. I do not know what my life would have become if I had lost her. She was God's ordained partner for me! She still believed in me, by faith seeing the new man I would become.

Rejected, except for one man: Jim Elliott. This passionate man, collegiate wrestling champion, had often stopped me on the campus in previous months to ask me. “What is your verse for today?” His walk in the spirit was so profound that some of the cynics on campus would drop their books as he passed them by, ridiculing him by bowing down crying “Allah!”

Along with the man who had counseled me, he became a prayer partner as I sought to rid myself of my double life. When the semester ended and we received our yearbooks, Jim wrote

his famous slogan beside his name in mine: *“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”*

Following final exams, I went to see Dean Fouts. I had already decided I did not want to stay at a college where my reputation would always be stained by my previous expulsion.

I asked him if I transferred to another Christian school and they requested a reference from him, would he give me a positive reference? After pondering for a moment, he piously told me that this issue was covered by the blood of the Lamb, and he would certainly give me a solid recommendation.

Based upon that promise, before I returned home, I went to Chicago, enrolled in the Northern Baptist Seminary undergraduate program, and moved all my belongings into the room I would occupy in the fall.

I returned home to get a job for the summer, working in a large meat packing house cutting up cows. The fellow workers were much older than I and lived wild lives. I braced myself for the few weeks I would be around them.

About two weeks later, my father called me into his office. He had opened a letter from the president of the Northern Baptist Seminary. It notified me that the Dean of Men at Wheaton College had sent a very negative report. I was rejected from entrance, requested to collect all my belongings as soon as possible from the dormitory.

God was still sandpapering me for future ministry and eventual future betrayals! He gently did this to me during a time when I was not ready for my ministry. At the time it filled me with anger. I did not take it well. I concluded that Christians could not be trusted, and I wanted nothing to do with Christians. The dark side of me took over.

That summer I went off the rails. My parents were unaware of my wild life, partying with older couples. I joined a club driving Offenhauser racing carts and furiously drove them in competitions.

My correspondence with Ruth continued. She told me she was enrolling in Northwestern Bible College in Minneapolis. I immediately decided to attend a college nearby, or even apply to the same college. I enrolled and was accepted at the university of Minnesota, thinking my past Wheaton experience would mean little to them. In any case, I wanted to be close to Ruth.

In the fall, I traveled to Minneapolis and went to be interviewed by Jerry Beavan, Dean of Men at Northwestern. He was a tall, slender Texan who wore cowboy boots.

I frankly told him the full story of my past and that my reason for enrolling was to be close to my girlfriend. I further told him that since the school had a similar pledge to the one at Wheaton, I would refuse to sign it. I think I was intentionally inviting rejection by the way I approached him.

He put his boots on his desktop, leaned back in his chair, and said, “Neighbour, I know about your family. I will make a deal with you. If you do not embarrass me, I will not embarrass you. You may enter for one semester on probation. No one will be told about this conversation. Deal?” We shook hands. I registered and began to share a locker with Ruth.

Double-minded Ralph emerged fully at this time! Jim Feely, another preacher’s kid, became my partner in drinking whiskey sours while studying our theology lessons at the Kennesaw bar. I rented a room off campus with Danny Boyer.

I bought a 1929 Plymouth for \$100 to travel to Saint Paul to visit Ruth in her home. I became a radio announcer on the college station KHCB and regularly went to preach weekly at a skid row mission to fill my Christian work assignment task. I still had a long way to go to mature out of double mindedness!

I had enrolled as a speech major with a minor in English. John Hart, later to become a CBS news commentator, became my debate partner. God inserted into my life Dr. Mark Lee, chairman of the Speech Department. He continually challenged me to become more mature. On debate trips he would play dominoes with us, digging into our worldview. This gave him a chance to attack mine and he often wiped it out! His disciplined life revealed a pattern of behavior I sought to copy.

Professor Ella Erway coached me daily for a full year to present my final exam, a Dramatic Interpretation. I presented the book *Ben Hur* using voice, body, and facial expression. I acted out fifteen characters for a full hour on stage. It was God's way of preparing me to present Bible stories that were almost acted out as I preached.

The Lord knew it was time before I graduated and went into ministry to terminate my double mindedness. I had just finished my announcing shift on KHCB when Ben Dirks offered me a free ticket to a Youth for Christ banquet. At this stage, I had little interest in hearing another Christian speaker, but a hearty meal was quite appealing. I planned to slip in, sit near the door, and when the speaker arose to speak, I would slip away.

When I arrived, all tables were already filled. One seat remained, right in front of the speaker's platform. God had penned me in!

The Palermo brothers sang and Dr. Bob Cook, President of Youth for Christ, rose to speak. Because he and my father had been students together at Wheaton College, he waved at me.

He did not just speak: he poured out his heart. He talked about Christian leaders who were phonies, who spoke in the flesh and not in the Spirit. He had no idea that the Holy Spirit was using him to deal with me by every word he spoke. My disillusionment with men in the pulpit was clearly exposed by everything he said. His final challenge was for anyone in the audience living a double life to make a choice: either follow God or follow Mammon!

Whew! The Holy Spirit was bringing me face to face with my double living. I got in my old 1929 Pontiac and drove back to my room behind the Minneapolis auditorium.

It was time! I would choose! Satan had a powerful grip on me at that moment and my choice was to disappear from my present life, drive to California, and become a secular person.

Following God was too great a price to pay. I was not going to any longer be double minded. I would become a secular person and ignore my religious past!

I threw some clothes in two suitcases and loaded up my old car. It was midnight and a light snow was falling.

As I started the engine, I thought to myself about what this would do to my precious parents. They had no reason to be hurt by my being the first person in generations of our family to forsake the Lord and live as an atheist.

Dr. Bob had announced that he and any who wished to join him could meet at Northwestern College for a full night of prayer. I thought to myself, "Before I leave town, I am going to drive over there. I will call him out of that prayer meeting and tell him to notify my parents of my decision. He can explain that I would be in touch with them when I got settled in California, working in a radio station.

At the college, the darkened cafeteria had all the chairs placed upside down on the tables. Beside it was a large room where people were praying.

I quietly slipped into the room and tapped Dr. Bob on the shoulder. In the cafeteria, we selected two chairs to sit on. I poured out to him my journey. I described all the deception in my own life and in the lives of others who had hurt me. I told him of my final decision to reject

Christianity and asked him to tell my parents to be patient while I resettled. I pledged to call them at a later date.

He stared me down with sadness in his eyes. Finally, he said, “Ralph, I want you to get on your knees and say goodbye to God before you go.”

I was stunned!

“You don’t understand. You are asking me to do another hypocritical act! I do not believe if I prayed anyone would be at the other end. I no longer believe in God. I simply cannot do that and keep my integrity. No! I will not pray!”

He then requested that I kneel down with him anyway while he prayed. Respectfully, I did so.

I have no earthly idea what he said in his prayers. I was facing God directly and he was dealing with me directly. Wave after wave of His powerful Presence rolled like waves into my spirit. I begin to shake and weep uncontrollably.

At that moment, I was unaware that I was being set free from demonic powers that were determined to destroy my life. I only knew I was a disobedient child of a loving God, who was not going to release me from the surrender of my life I had made as a five-year-old child.

I think we must have talked more after that, but it is all a blur. I turned my car around and went back to my room and unpacked my bags. Totally exhausted, I fell asleep.

The next morning, I awoke late, rushed to the college to get my books from the locker I shared with Ruth. When it was time to go to chapel, I waited by the locker to meet Ruth so we could sit together.

She flew into my arms saying, “Ralph, my friends say something wonderful has happened to you? Tell me what has happened?”

I had no idea that my very countenance had been converted from how I had previously looked. I only knew that old things had passed away and all things had become new. Just months before I would step into ministry, the sandpapering was over. I had lost my double mindedness.

God then spoke to me about Dean Fouts and the months of bitterness and hate I had lived with toward him. At a convenient time later in the year, I journeyed back to Wheaton College. I entered his office to speak to him face-to-face. He was most uncomfortable at the start.

I shared my journey with him, explaining I had come back to embrace him and thank him for having the courage to stop my downward spiral. While I thought at the time, he meant to damage me, he was really part of God’s plan to restore a rebellious child.



Now my heart burned within me to sincerely preach the gospel. But the Holy Spirit still had to teach me something. I had easily gone to preach and then slip immediately back into the other side of my life without respecting the sacredness of what I had done.

I contacted Jiggs Williams who was responsible for sending students on preaching assignments to churches and rescue missions. “Sorry, Ralph. I don’t have anything right now. All spots are filled.” How could this be? He has always been scrambling for people to preach!

No opportunities? It went on for a month! Gradually I realized what was happening.

The Holy Spirit was making me understand that any ministry He assigned to me after this had to be considered as the most sacred events in my life. Never again would I dishonor a ministry opportunity and take it for any reason, especially for compensation. Proclaiming the majesty of God is a sacred event, never to be diluted for any secondary profits which might result from it.

Now, in my old age, no longer able to travel and speak, I cherish the opportunities given to me by people sent my way either in person or by the Internet who might profit from my sharing. Serving God and his kingdom on this earth does not stop until he calls us home.

PART 2: EARLY MINISTRY 1951 – 1959

W. B Riley founded Northwestern Bible School while pastoring the First Baptist Church in Minneapolis. It gradually grew from meeting in the church building to a building of its own facing Loring Park. Youth for Christ was very strong at that time. That ministry actually moved 100 pianos from churches and music stores into the Minneapolis auditorium for an amazing concert. Don Hustad was flown in from Chicago to direct it. A full six hours of rehearsals preceded the public event.

Billy Graham was a vice president of Youth for Christ. He had been preaching in the huge Minneapolis auditorium when George Wilson, Regional Director, took him to visit the dying Dr. Riley.

Graham was in the process of forming his evangelistic team to work primarily inside Youth for Christ. On his deathbed, Riley told Graham that God had told him that he was to become the next President of Northwestern College. He acquiesced.

Although his major calling was evangelism, he undertook to preside as president of a college while continuing his evangelistic crusades around the country. During my last two years in college, he would drop in from time to time, speak in chapel, conduct board meetings, and depart for the next crusade.

In 1950, he arranged for Dr. Paul Maddox, former chief of chaplains during World War II in Europe, to become administrative vice president. R. V. Clearwaters was a fighting fundamentalist preacher on the board. He was angry that Graham had been picked instead of him to be President.

Clearwaters made the board meetings combative. At this time, I worked as a volunteer for George Wilson who also served as the Financial Officer of the college.

In late 1949 as Graham conducted a crusade in Los Angeles, William Randolph Hearst was impacted by his ministry. He sent a two-word telegram to his many newspapers around the United States saying, "Puff Graham!" He instantly became nationally prominent.

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association was formed, and George Wilson became the Executive President. I was retained part-time by George to assist him with the logistics of regional Youth for Christ activities as he took on this new task. The Graham headquarters office opened around the corner from Northwestern College.

At this time, Billy launched the Hour of Decision radio and television broadcast. Mailbags of contributions and correspondence began to pour into the facility.

George hired a retired missionary woman who had served in China to read each letter, using a red pencil to underline questions or topics to be answered.

He called me in and handed me 50 letters and said, "Answer them for me as I go to lunch. Sit at my desk and use my Dictaphone." A few days later, he put me on staff full time to handle all correspondence. We had dozens and dozens of letters underlined in red to be answered. Two persons were needed to read all the letters!

By the time I graduated, we had automated a system under my supervision. Wilson discovered a new typewriter called Flexowriter. This amazing machine typed words automatically, driven by a paper piano roll that played typewriter keys instead of music.

This made it possible for individually typed letters to be prepared. He also found a device that held a fountain pen and wrote Billy Graham's signature with real ink to sign every letter.

Within three months of my graduation, I had a section of the office with six secretaries operating Flexowriters. My job was to supervise them and answer all subjects Graham mentioned in a sermon that drew questions to be answered. I prepared paragraphs to be included in the letters. By punching one of nine keys, the operators could mingle several paragraphs before the letter was typed.

Young Ralph had his own office and a private secretary! A kid with a fresh college diploma on the wall! These were exciting months. Billy himself would come to town to check on the college and visit with us.

At this time, Ruth had an engagement ring, and I had a used Hudson car.

A trustee meeting was organized by Dr. Maddox that would prove to be ugly. R. V. Clearwaters'

jealousy of Billy had prepared him for a good fight. I was included in a conference with Billy Graham, Dr. Maddox, and George Wilson. Billy had come to the end of his willingness to carry this burden. It was his intention to resign.

It was decided there needed to be a recording of the meeting. At this time (1953), a thin wire passing through a magnetizer made a sound recording possible. I entered the board room early in the afternoon and wired the microphone Billy would use to a wire recorder in a closet behind him. I hid in there during the meeting, listening on headphones to the fracas. I stayed in the closet until the last person left. I have often wondered what happened to that transcription.

Billy was very honest as he resigned. He stated that he would never again allow someone else to tell him what God wanted him to do!

I recall several activities I got involved with during this period. Cliff Barrows was given a new jeep by a television listener. I offered to drive it to his Melody Ranch in North Carolina. As I drove through the mountains of Tennessee, I lost my way. On the side of the mountain was a small log cabin. I climbed the hill to ask directions from a man sitting on the porch. After listening to me, he pulled the pipe out of his mouth and shouted to the screened door, "Martha, there's a *damnyankee* out here needing directions." This was my introduction to the South.

On another occasion, as I sat in my chair in my fancy office overlooking my tribe of typists, Lorraine Edberg, George's secretary, summoned me to his office. Sternly, he ordered me to shut the door.

I became tense. What had I done? "Neighbour, I want you to wash the windows on the outside of our office. Come back when you are finished."

Was he trying to make me quit? I would not! Grudgingly I got a bucket of hot water and a squeegee and completed the task. When I reported back, he said, "I noticed that the women's toilets in your section have not been cleaned in some time. Come back when you are finished."

Dressed in my white shirt and tie like any good business executive, I was already sweaty from the first job. Of course, I had to leave the toilet door open while I did this duty, knowing my six secretaries were snickering.

When I reported back, he said, "Go to the post office and pick up the bags of mail and deliver them to the basement to be read." By the time I did so, the day had been pretty used up and staff was departing.

I slept poorly that night, determined that it would take more than this for me to quit! The next day, I took work clothes in a bag as I went to work. I was ready for anything.

Again, Lorraine called me into George's office. Again, he told me to shut the door. Leaning back in his seat he smiled and said, "I guess you wonder what is going on, don't you? Well, Billy called me and asked me if I could spare you to come to Los Angeles to help with a big event to be held in the Hollywood Bowl. I had never had a chance to observe whether you would do the dirty work as well as the easy work. You have passed my test! Ask Lorraine to book you on the next flight to Los Angeles. By the way here is a check with a raise."

When I got to Los Angeles, I discovered Roy Rogers and Dale Evans were going to have a Billy Graham rally for children in the Hollywood Bowl. Balloons were blown up all night to be given to each child as they poured into the event.

We finished about 3:30 in the morning. My hotel room was close to Billy's room. As I passed by his door, I saw light shining under the bottom. I paused to listen and heard this man of God praying aloud!

I remained for several days, meeting Cecil B. DeMille and other dignitaries. I also was invited to attend the team meeting held every night after the crusade meeting where the staff gathered for a light meal.

It was there I saw another side of this great evangelist. He commented on the feedback of the sound system in the service. He stated that while he knew the union had defended the sound operator, previous experience had taught him never to use that person twice. He ordered him to be replaced.

I was also very active helping George with the regional Youth for Christ rallies in Minnesota, Wisconsin, North and South Dakota. Sometimes I would accompany speakers from city to city making all arrangements for them.

Stuart Hamblen was an actor, singer and songwriter who had come to Christ in the Los Angeles Billy Graham crusade. He came to do a series of YFC meetings in the Dakotas.

In one small town, we were housed in a hotel with carpeted stairs and a pool table in the lobby. All the pool sharks in town came there to gamble. After I went to bed, Stuart joined them and cleaned all their pockets of money. By noon the next day, gossip had given the evangelist for that night a reputation not expected. Hamblen was a very new Christian. When I explained he had created a problem, he looked at me with great innocence and said, "I had no idea that was a problem. I just figured it would help draw the crowd we needed to the meeting."

Hamblen had a special way of taking the offering at the meetings. He would first sing several songs, then lay down his guitar. He wore two holsters with cowboy pistols in them. He would pull them out and point them into the audience, explaining that he wanted no questions about anyone cheating on supporting the work of God. "Now, pass the plates!" The people loved it!

Because I had purchased a used but very luxurious Packard car, I was assigned to drive George Beverly Shea to a city about 90 miles away for a musical concert. As it began to get dark, we were driving on a two-lane road at 70 miles an hour. A farmer pulling a tractor and a hayrack pulled straight across the road.

I froze as I realized I did not have time to break to a stop. We were going to be in a terrible accident!

I swerved off the road to the right and sped through a ditch. The car rushed forward, and I was able to get it back up on the highway.

When the car stopped, I was trembling! I had one of the most famous singers in the world in my little car and nearly caused both of our deaths.

Beverly Shea patted me gently on the shoulder and said, "Son, we have just seen our heavenly father protect us. Let us thank him now." Humbly he prayed and then told me to proceed. Everything about him revealed the presence of the indwelling Christ.



A wealthy Catholic man in Houston named George Strake decided to give Billy Graham an amazing property, Glen Eyrie, in Colorado Springs. It contained a castle built by a Civil War general that was air conditioned by a system that brought cool air through a hole in the mountain behind to ventilate the entire place. Fireplaces were created with imported tile from Europe.

A mansion named the Pink House was maintained by servants. A lovely guest house was built beside a stream and nearby was an airplane landing strip. This property was right beside the Garden of the Gods and had similar stone pillars.

George and Billy flew down to see it. It was decided it might be used as a college sponsored by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. A local realtor indicated that someone needed to remain present on the property with power of attorney to sign the many documents required for the transfer of such an estate.

Since all the person had to do, once notarized, was to sign papers, I was sent to live on the property. The realtor drove me out and installed me in the Pink House. Servants prepared my meals and assisted me in visiting the castle and other areas of the estate.

Eventually both Strake's group and Graham's team flew in. They lived in the Pink House, and I occupied the guest house. As I think about all of that now, I shake my head in amazement! I was still just a kid out of college, engaged to Ruth with my life ministry still to come.

That property did not remain in the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association very long. A rumor got out that there would be a Billy Graham college. The Southern Baptist convention exploded! They did not want the competition!

As a result, Billy Graham gave the property to the Navigators. Dawson Trotman was directing the training of Crusade counselors, traveling with the team. It was a handshake agreement. I recall that the Navigators were unable to make payments on the mortgage. As a result, controversy began between the two organizations. Graham called a meeting and settled it by paying off the mortgage completely, allowing the navigators to have the property debt-free.



My courtship with Ruth was another sandpapering event for me. Her father was not pleased that she continued to see me after the mess I made at Wheaton College. He tolerated my presence while her mother was more friendly. After we had both graduated, I wanted us to be married.

Ruth had a strong commitment to the scriptural teaching that as long as her father was responsible for her life, she would obey his wishes. He felt strongly she should wait until I proved myself more.

I knew I had entered a new phase of my walk with the Lord and pushed for us to go ahead and marry, despite his objections. When I pressed her to choose between me or her father, I put her in a terrible spot. She wept bitterly and refused to choose between us. In that moment, the Lord told me to back off! I have always regretted that I did that to her.

We were engaged for almost 4 years, waiting for him to give his permission. I sought to spend time with him, but it made little difference. In retrospect, he had every right to doubt me. He explained to Ruth that scripture taught that the sins of the father would influence the children. He had only his best desires for his only daughter.

In 1951, Dad Johnston contracted cancer of the liver. In January 1952 it had become terminal. By early February, he was hospitalized in great pain. I spent many hours with him then. I would ask him what scripture he would like me to read for him. He would request the passage in Revelation that spoke of the new Jerusalem. As I read it, tears would come to his eyes and he would say, "Ralph! Think of that!"

I felt we had come to a new relationship. He began to walk on streets of gold on February 29, 1952.

During his last days, I became so involved with him that I forgot about an engagement I had to show the Billy Graham film in Mankato, Minnesota. The city auditorium had been booked and every church in town was cooperating. In the strain of the situation, I forgot about this commitment!

I awoke the morning after the showing, finally remembering the engagement. A deep dread filled my spirit! What had I done? I quickly called George on the phone.

"George? It's Ralph!"

"I don't want to talk to you!" Click.

Later that day, we faced each other in his office. My punishment was one week without pay and a demand that I go to Mankato and face the Pastors and apologize.

When I stood before them profoundly apologizing. When I explained what had taken place in my life, they graciously forgave me.

This event turned out to be a major trauma for me. I often still have a recurring dream that I have done it again. To this day, I dread forgetting an appointment.



Ruth's mother wore a black band on her left arm according to Swedish tradition for 30 days. On day 31, she called Ruth and me to the living room of her apartment. She explained she wanted us to live in it while she returned to Sweden for a long visit. She gave permission for us to marry as soon as possible!

Wedding plans began. May 8, 1952 was the date set.

Soon after the announcement, we heard a rumor that friends of her older brother Art were planning a practical joke on us. They would kidnap Ruth at the reception and keep her overnight.

I began to make my own plans. My roommate at that time was Herbert Maske, a former Chicago taxi driver who looked like someone from the mafia. He took two dozen eggs and put them over the stove where they would become rotten. I visited the St. Paul sheriff's office and explained why I needed to borrow a set of handcuffs.

At the reception as I saw these guys ready to pounce on Ruth, I quickly handcuffed us together. Herbert drove the getaway car while I threw rotten eggs out of the window at the car following us. (We later learned it ate through the paint on the hood.) We dashed into one hotel, through the lobby and out the back door, across the street to a second hotel where we spent our first night.

On that honeymoon night I gave Ruth a Bible with the words written inside, "Each for the other, both for Christ." We both agreed we would be first committed to Christ and then committed to each other. I never stop thanking God that I waited for him to give me the very best for my life, my precious *stackars liten flicka*.



A few weeks after we were married, our first son Ralph was conceived, Born June 13, 1953. At the time Ruth was working at the Northern Pacific Railroad Hospital. Dr. Samuel Borgen was on the staff there and we became personal friends. He was not yet married.

Occasionally after work we would go together to the Road Buddy's restaurant for ribs. Ruth knew by his cursing at work that he was not yet a believer. Several times as we were eating together, the Lord prompted me to speak to him about receiving Christ as his Savior. I even secured a red leather Scofield Reference Bible and imprinted his name on the front cover, thinking I could use it to open a conversation about his accepting Christ. I was rather awed by him and told myself there would be the "right time," and to wait for that moment.

We chose him to be the doctor to deliver our baby. When Ruth was admitted into the hospital, we had a long night of waiting together with him for her to deliver. I can still see him in his surgical clothes and mask hanging from his neck, relaxed in the chair as we chatted hour after hour. The Holy Spirit prompted me to speak to him then. I decided that the moment I did so, she would go into labor and my chance would be lost. I did not bring it up.

Taking our new baby home from the hospital, once again the Lord prompted me to speak to him.

I was scheduled to take a trip connected to my work at the Billy Graham office. I promised myself that as soon as I came back, I would surely approach him.

When that trip ended, I returned to our apartment around midnight. I kissed little Ralph in his crib and slipped into bed, reaching over to caress Ruth's face. Her pillow was wet with tears.

"Honey, what's wrong?"

"Dr. Borgen is dead."

My heart sank! He was in his early thirties – how could such a thing take place? She shared that he had gone water skiing and fell into the water. The speed boat driver whirled the boat around to pick him up. He was sliced by the whirling propellers and bled to death.

At the funeral home, his housekeeper came to us and introduced herself. She spoke to me and said that he had great admiration for me. He had mentioned to her that one day he would like to discuss religion with me. My heart sank!

"You, son of man, are the watchman. I've made you a watchman for Israel. The minute you hear a message from me, warn them. If I say to the wicked, 'Wicked man, wicked woman, you're on the fast track to death!' and you don't speak up and warn the wicked to change their ways, the wicked will die unwarned in their sins and I'll hold you responsible for their bloodshed."

Ezekiel 33:7-8, The Message

Our Lord was still sandpapering me. From my childhood I had an evangelistic zeal, but it all focused on pulpit preaching or crusades. Personal evangelism had never been set in proper proportion.

The personal responsibility I faced from this experience changed many things in my life. God knew this Boot Camp experience would set me on a new journey, one that gave me the responsibility to later equip Texas Baptists. I became responsible for Personal Evangelism for the state convention. It was then I wrote *Witness, Take the Stand!* and included this poem in the introduction:

*He was my friend.
We spoke of nearly everything
But Christ.
I denied him this.
Peter, you denied,
Yet lived to say.
"Forgive me, Friend.
I can only weep.
My friend lives in hell
Forever.*



Billy Graham had sponsored an evangelistic film titled *Mr. Texas*, premiered in the Hollywood Bowl in 1951. Walter Smyth was retained to open a film distribution office in Washington, D.C.

I was seconded by George to travel with Hollywood actor Redd Harper, presiding over citywide showings.

I took the offering and gave the invitation, introducing Redd for his testimony. Billy Graham had received a donation of a baby blue Buick convertible we used for our travel. We went from city to city covering many midwestern states. Redd would go night clubbing after the meetings, finding old buddies playing in bands and bringing them at midnight to our hotel room to find Christ. He was married to a Mexican lady prior to his conversion who did not understand this new man her husband had become in Christ. We constantly prayed for her as we traveled.

In late 1953, I was asked to transfer to the Washington office as assistant to Walter Smyth. I was 24 years old at the time. My responsibilities included booking dates for four teams who traveled with carbon projectors to project films in city auditoriums. I was also responsible to print and distribute billboards, flyers, etc. This threw me into a whole new world.



Billy Graham was invited to speak at the Washington Senate prayer breakfast. Richard Nixon invited Billy to accompany him to the Capitol. I was directed as the breakfast ended to get my Buick Riviera and wait in front of the hotel. To my surprise, these two men got in the back seat. Motorcycle police turned on sirens to rush us through traffic to the Capitol building. Although the men were talking constantly during the trip, I was so focused on weaving through the traffic that I cannot remember a thing they said.



At that time, the camera crew was shooting *Souls in Conflict*. The most famous artist producing 24 sheet film billboards was in the Times Square building in New York City. It was decided that we would use him for the new project. This required many trips by train.

Additional responsibility for publishing and distribution of all newspaper advertising, etc., was placed upon my shoulders. One day at the office my chest was filled with pain. I thought I was having a heart attack. An ambulance was called, and I was taken to a hospital.

The emergency room doctor sat me down and asked what I was doing when I had the attack. I began to outline all my responsibilities, which caused me to break down. He gently said to me that I was in over my head, that my heart was just fine. He said, "If you can't stand the heat in the kitchen, it's time to move to another room." It was then God began to move me in a different direction.

Soon after that experience, I was scheduled to show Mr. Texas for the Mount Zion Baptist Church in Bethesda, Maryland. Pastor Claude Brubaker took me aside afterward to explain he had just purchased a small church and parsonage for \$10,000 from a Church of God. It was located nearby on Montrose Road. He suggested I might like to consider helping him with the project.

The next day we walked through the property. As we did so, I recalled a comment made by Torrey Johnson, President of Youth for Christ, who had visited our Washington office: "Neighbour, when are you going to stop being a film jockey and begin preaching like God called you to do?"

I became aware as we stood in that little church auditorium that the breakdown in my office was a divine summons to change directions. On July 18, 1954, I was re-ordained as a Southern Baptist and became the official Pastor of an empty building named The Montrose Baptist Church.

Still temporarily working for the film ministry, we moved into the small parsonage. Claude located a purple piano in a bankrupt dance hall and a truck used to move coffins volunteered to move it to the church auditorium that seated about 150 people. I created a direct mail flyer covering the adjacent neighborhood inviting people to visit us.

Ruth had barely enough ability to play hymns on the piano, but she courageously volunteered. The first Sunday we had one lady and her daughter show up. While she reeked of tobacco, she seemed ready to pioneer with us.

Behind the property was a trailer park with about 50 families who were unchurched. To entice them, I erected one of the folding screens we used in church meetings to show Mr. Texas on the lot behind our house. This brought conversions. Soon we were off and running.

I terminated my employment to live by faith on the church offerings and some support from my Uncle Charles. When funds ran out, I sold my Buick Riviera. I purchased an old Ford that needed a new battery. I parked it on the side of the road in front of the church. I would push it down the hill to jumpstart it when I needed to use it. Eventually uncle Charles replaced it with a better car.

We began to collect a membership from the surrounding area. A policeman, an FBI agent, an entrepreneur who was marketing cleaning products joined us. These mingled well with people from the trailer park. One Navy sailor joined with his family. The church was formally organized and constituted. Claude Brubaker's vision was realized.

During this period, Ruth had two miscarriages. The second one took place soon after we planted the church. Pregnant for just a few weeks, she began to have great pain. After examination, the doctor explained she had a cyst on her ovary and needed immediate surgery. The hospital required a \$75 deposit. My first thought was to ask my dad for the money.

I did not know it at the time, but this was a divine event inserted into my life for a new time of sandpapering, one that would take several years. I was not prepared to hear how my father responded to my request.

My father said, "I told you when you married that you were on your own financially. I do not feel led to send you any money." I wrestled with anger and resentment. How could he do that to me? A second call to one of the men in my church secure the funds instantly, as a gift, not a loan.

Experiencing the sadness of losing those babies created a bond between Ruth and me, and many women we would meet who miscarried. We could understand their pain as we prayed with them beside their hospital beds. We feel God used this experience to prepare us to minister to others.

We had decided we probably could not have any more children. We made application to the Holt Adoption Agency to secure a Korean baby. While being oriented by them, Ruth became pregnant again.

Our second son Rodney Charles was born June 14, 1956. I had an inner hesitation as we brought him home from the hospital. We had lost two babies; could I really trust this little tyke to live and not die? In later years, I remembered this and wondered if he ever sensed that his daddy could not fully accept him at the beginning for fear of losing him? He and Ralph 3 were born exactly 3 years and one day apart. Double birthday parties have occurred throughout their lives.



During 1955-56 I took a course at St. Elizabeth Hospital to learn how to paster the mentally ill. This massive federal hospital had thousands of patients. I spent every Tuesday for a year in the wards and the lectures. Dr. Ernest Bruder was an amazing mentor. He powerfully influenced my awareness of the hell endured by troubled minds. Insights gained were used in many ways in future years.

Fellow students were from Catholic and liturgical Protestant churches, my first exposure to those serving God outside my "Baptist bubble." I discovered that their action of placing the wine-dipped wafer on the tongue at a Communion service (Intinction) brought almost instant healing to a mentally ill person. It seemed to confirm God's acceptance of them when they could not accept themselves.



On January 8, 1956, Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Peter Fleming, and Roger Youderian were speared to death by a group of Auca warriors.

I had just made a Pastoral visit at the Institutes of Health and was driving back to our church on Montrose Road when my radio announced the death of these five men, martyrs all. I pulled over at the side of the road, stunned!

Memories of four of these five flooded my mind. The first three were companions at Wheaton College; Roger Youderian graduated one year before me from Northwestern College. As the news report continued, the Holy Spirit began to convict me.

Both Ruth and I had been called in our teenage years to be missionaries. From time to time, Ruth would mention to me as we served in Minnesota and Washington/Maryland that we had been called to foreign missions. Life was so challenging and exciting related to the Billy Graham activities and the planting of the Montrose church, that I hesitated to make any changes.

That night, Ruth and I decided we absolutely had to move on and become a part of those missionaries who would replace our martyred friends. We applied to the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. We were told I had to have a seminary degree.

I consulted with a member of the Maryland Baptist Convention office to get his recommendation for the proper seminary to attend. Without hesitation, he said that the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary was the place for missionaries to go for training. We immediately made application and were accepted.

As I thought about a Pastor to follow me at the Montrose church, the name of Bob Crowley appeared in my mind. We had become close; I knew him to be solid theologically and passionate to win souls. He pastored a country church a few miles away. I called and asked him if he would pray about my recommending him. He said he would do so.

Neither of us know how this word got out, but a few days later Bob was driving past the church he pastored on a weekday night and saw the lights were on. He entered to find his deacons meeting without him. These rascals were going to beat him to the punch. Instead of letting him go through the process of candidating and resigning, they fired him on the spot!

Bob called me to report this. I assured him that my recommendation to our congregation would confirm his invitation to Pastor. I immediately called a church conference and upon my recommendation he was invited. His moving van waited on the side of the road while our moving van loaded up. That very night, the little parsonage behind the church was occupied by the new Pastor and his family.



We took a side trip on our way to New Orleans, visiting my uncle Charles in Oklahoma City. He had been so generous in supporting our ministry and had given us a lovely used Ford automobile. As we made our way to New Orleans, our second son Rodney, just a few months old, had a fever and was crying endlessly. I drove through the night to end our journey and got stopped by a policeman for speeding. When he heard Rodney crying and my explanation, he said, "Hammer down, son, I am the last state trooper between here and New Orleans."

New apartments were being constructed on the campus. While we waited, I rented an apartment a few blocks away. We settled in just in time for a hurricane to rip through the town.

Debris smashed out one of our windows and we tacked a rug to the opening until the storm was over.

While we received some small funds from relatives and friends, we were on our own financially. A love offering from the Montrose Church carried us through the first semester.

I applied at the Times Picayune newspaper for a night job and was interviewed by a lovely Christian lady. She had just the right position for me that would allow me time to study on the job between receiving payments for daily subscriptions. Each night, I would take in money or checks that occupied no more than half my shift time. The rest was devoted to learning Greek and then Hebrew.

Roland Q. Leavell was the president. He taught a mandatory class on evangelism. It required memorization of 100 scripture verses that could be used in working with unbelievers. He randomly selected students to stand and recite them. He was determined no Pastor would graduate without an ability to win souls.

One day I boarded the bus to go to work and saw him seated halfway back next to the window. Smiling, I started to sit beside him. He pushed me back and said, "Please don't sit beside me. This is the only way I can get out of that seminary environment and meet lost people. I ride buses to the end of the line and back to witness to the people who sit beside me. You will rob me of that opportunity. Thank you for understanding." This amazing man practiced what he taught!"

B. Gray Alison was Professor of Missions. His zeal for winning unbelievers was obvious in every class meeting. He took a very personal interest in every one of us headed for the mission field. So significant was he to my development that when our third son was born, we named him Randall Gray Neighbour.

Dr. Leavell allowed some professors to teach that could not be called liberal or conservative. These middle-of-the-road teachers disturbed me. When I asked him about it, he indicated that in academia it was necessary.

After He retired, Leo H. Eddleman followed him. He was a friend of Billy Graham and knew I had worked for him. We developed a friendship and often visited around the campus. I knew him to be theologically conservative.

I had a New Testament professor named Dr. Clark who stated one day in class that he could list a dozen books as inspired as the Bible. I was stunned! I was several years older than most of my classmates and waited for one of them to object, but no one seem to be upset but me. I raised my hand to interrupt him, and he ignored me. I then stood to my feet and said, "Dr. Clark, please list those twelve books as inspired as the Bible so we preacher boys can use them to prepare our sermons!" His face blushed as he slammed his notes together and marched out of the room.

I immediately went to the President's Office and demanded to see Dr. Eddleman. I informed him of what had just happened in the classroom. Without saying another word, he opened the files on his desk and handed me a folder. "Neighbour, keep your mouth shut after you read this and leave it with my secretary." With that, I left his office to open the file. It was a letter to the Board of Trustees recommending that this professor be fired immediately. They met that very night and he never finished teaching a class that semester. I treasure the time I had at that seminary.



Opportunities to preach revival meetings constantly appeared during my seminary years. Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama were all places where I was invited by other students to preach.

Eventually I was recommended to the Southside Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida. This congregation of several hundred members became a precious experience. They housed us on weekends in a little shed built on the back of the church building. A precious black member came to babysit our two children. Food was always in the refrigerator, prepared for us by the ladies of the church.

I had time for red fishing and enjoyed a beautiful beach to take the church youth on picnics. On one Saturday afternoon, I met with them at the front of the church wearing shorts. It was proper attire for a beach.

A Godly ninety-year-old lady I called "Mama Mayo" lived just a block away. She had been a charter member since the church was formed. The following Sunday morning, I stood at the back of the church to greet everyone as they left. As she approached me, she turned away, refusing to shake my hand. I knew something was wrong!

"Mama Mayo, what's wrong?"

Tearing up, she said, "I am not sure I can ever hear you preach again."

"Mama, what have I done?"

"I never thought in my lifetime I would see my Pastor wearing shorts."

We had just been studying in our theology class about adiaphora, doubtful things. These are areas of conduct that are not in themselves wrong but may offend the core values of other believers. Paul dealt with this in passages like these:

It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble (Romans 14:21).

Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble (1 Corinthians 8:13).

Ouch! Another sandpapering of my ministry! Classroom theology was being illustrated right before my eyes. It only took about five seconds for me to run through two thoughts:

1. This is a silly old lady that I am going to ignore. There is nothing wrong with what I did.
2. I have the opportunity to bless her life by promising her I will never do that again!

From that moment on, in Pensacola I never changed into my shorts until I got to the beach.

In later years I had to learn that in every culture there are things that offend, things I could not know about in advance. More than once in the years that have passed, I have bumped into “Mama Mayos” who took offense to something I said or did that I did not even understand at the time. In every case I have sought to bless those lives by promising never to do it again.



As the months passed, I became aware of a fellow student, Peter Lord, who was pastoring a nearby Baptist church located to accommodate a low-cost housing area. He and I both preached passionately. This drew members back and forth, depending on what series of sermons we were presenting. We began to have lunch on Saturdays to discuss the competition between the two churches. They were just too close to each other. We decided to merge them.

He had graduated one year ahead of me. We agreed that he would remain after the merger, and I would move on to the mission field. We began blending the congregations by combining men’s breakfasts and women’s fellowship meetings. We swapped pulpits. In a few months, we realized the groups had well merged. When we proposed combining the churches, the recommendation was to sell the Southside Baptist property that had not been well cared for, using the funds to build a larger auditorium at his church site.

The merger passed unanimously by both congregations. Peter preached the first Sunday morning and I that night, resigning to end my time in Pensacola. Peter went on to be a mighty dynamo, influencing Pastors across the nation until he passed away March 4, 2021.



The next ministry to prepare me for my future took place just after we finished the Pensacola Pastorate. The Hayne Boulevard Baptist Church was a wood shack built on stilts on Redfish Street northeast of the seminary a block from Lake Ponchartrain. It was a seedy part of town.

Hayne Boulevard was not actually a boulevard; it was a two-lane road that ran along the Lake.

By building a boardwalk 100 feet long, shacks could be erected on the lake that were not covered by city law. Many brothels existed there. On the right side of the road there were literally dozens of bars.

Years earlier, this white wooden one room church building had been erected by students. It had been pastored by 13 students in 11 years.

The little congregation had about 80 people, most of them retired. Odell Peart and his wife and children were a cut above the rest. They gladly welcomed Ruth and me and we saw them as the backbone in the group.

I quickly became frustrated with a congregation made up of dry bones. After a few months I realized that outreach had never been done to the community of Cajuns who lived on the road. A few carnal Baptist families did little more than attend.

When Mardi Gras came, I discovered the Pierts belonged to one of the clubs that sponsored a float. We missed them for that season. The chairman of the deacons would sit in his undershirt in a chair on his front lawn drinking a beer and wave at me as I went to conduct Wednesday evening prayer meetings.

It was time to separate the sheep from the goats. I prepared a sermon using the text in Deuteronomy 1:2: There are eleven days’ journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir unto Kadesh-barnea.

The point I wanted to make was that an 11-day journey required 40 years of wandering in the wilderness for a whole generation to die off so a new generation of Israelites could enter the promised land. I made it clear that I would perform my Pastoral duties if anyone became sick or needed help, but I intended to focus my attention on only those who were willing to be trained to win the community to Christ.

I was quite severe in explaining the church had suffered from carnality that had driven Pastor after Pastor to give up on them and leave defeated. When I gave the invitation inviting those who wanted to travel with me to reach out to the community, the only ones who did were the Pearts.

I put the building up for sale. We took the small amount of money it sold for and went around the corner on Hayne Boulevard and bought one lot. I contacted a Christian contractor who agreed to help us free of charge to erect a new structure for the church. He designed the building for me with folding doors on the sides that created small classrooms and opened for public seating. He also supervised construction free of charge.

I made an appeal during seminary chapel for students to help me dig a foundation and help to erect the concrete block structure. More than a dozen volunteered. We began to dig in the stickiest clay Louisiana could produce! It was backbreaking work. Meanwhile, I sold church bonds to raise the necessary funds to put up the structure. We finally erected a beautiful little building with colored glass in the front.

Meanwhile, Odell Piert and I began to minister up and down the road visiting the bars, leaving cards behind with the bartenders. We asked them to give our cards to people in trouble who needed help with problems. Gradually old members returned, seminary students joined, and the church numbered more than 150. We even had a choir!

In the lot adjacent to us was a four-room shotgun house occupied by Jean Essys Guilbeau. He had a job with the park system and drove a patrol car up and down the borders of the lake. He had a willingness to attend Sunday service, even though he had been Catholic all his life. Soon he became aware that he needed to receive Christ. This dear man came forward and from his Catholic background to drop to his knees in front of me and said, "Guilbeau gives his life to Jesus!" When Rodney was small, we dropped him off at his home as Ruth went to work. He learned to enjoy Cajun food. We dearly loved this simple couple.

After construction had finished, I had a baptismal service for a young engineer. We had constructed dressing rooms on the left and right side of the platform for men and women to change garments. Sets of wooden steps dropped into the water from both sides. I planned to baptize him at the end of the song service and choir anthem, slipping out of my waders to preach.

Unfortunately, after I entered the water and the engineer stepped off the wooden stairs, they came loose and rolled over on top of us! This was unseen by the audience; the choir hid us from view.

I was soaking wet. We exited the pool on the lady's side. Fortunately, we had installed back doors to both rooms. I sent the engineer back to change his clothes on the men's side and pondered what to do about me! I quickly thought about Gilbeau: he was about my size.

I stepped over the small fence separating his land from ours, slipped in the open back door and rifled through his clothes closet. Quickly putting on his shirt and pants, I entered the back door and strolled to the pulpit to preach.

Gilbeau had been born with a congenital eye problem and wore thick lenses. As I spoke, he was squinting at me. When he realized what he was seeing, he stood up pointing at me saying, "Dat prechah! He got me pants on!"

Embarrassed, I replied, "Gilbeau, please shut up and sit down!"

Our ministry began to change the culture of that road. I became known as the chaplain of the bars along Hayne Boulevard.



Ruth and I were continually interviewed during our study at New Orleans seminary by the foreign mission board representative. She suggested I consider remaining after graduating to secure a Ph.D. This would qualify me to become a seminary president in Africa. Following her advice, I stayed on to study Church History under Dr. Penrose St. Amant.

As I look backward, I realize why God caused me to invest this time. St. Amant set on the edge of his desk as he spoke to us for the first time. He reminded us that if we received this advance degree, there came with it a responsibility to hold the Southern Baptist Convention at arm's length, study its flaws, and speak truth to it. He stressed the importance of pioneering change in areas of church life. Wow!

That set me on fire. I approached my study intent on learning more about a famous change agent in church history: Martin Luther. My research helped me understand how movements changed generation by generation.

Martin Luther was a visionary, a risk taker, an entrepreneur. He threw bottles of ink at a real devil in his room and left blots on the wall. I saw that a change agent had to pay a price and that passion alone without the presence of the Holy Spirit could never produce true change.

That led me to study his successor, someone I had never considered before. Melancthon was totally unlike Luther. He observed the fire of Luther and tried to freeze it into structure. He was a systems man through and through. I began to see that a movement beginning with passion could easily dissipate into habitual structures that would kill the original vision. By the third generation, the Lutheran Church produced a formal structure that no longer needed to crusade against the evils of Catholicism.

This set me to examining our denomination. I began to see things in a new light, but at this stage the light was dim. I was not yet on fire. Looking back, God knew my Boot Camp experience would require new territories of training before my final assignment would be given to me.

PART 2: PLANTING MINISTRY 1959 – 94

We were able to buy a small house in the Hayne Boulevard community for \$18,000. While I Pastored the church and worked on my graduate degree, Ruth was driving into the city to work as nurse to a gynecologist. Ralph was in the first grade and Rodney enjoyed being with the Guilbeau family during the day. We were filling out paperwork for the Foreign Mission Board. What could possibly go wrong?

My precious Ruth had a very pressured life, nursing, pastoring the women, keeping up the household, driving long distances back-and-forth to the hospital. She complained of a pain in her stomach. She had contracted a small ulcer. She began to respond to medication and her symptoms decreased.

We had our next interview with the woman who interviewed candidates for the mission field. When we mentioned this to her, she sadly said that this disqualified us for foreign service!

It was explained that if stress in our own culture caused ulcers, it was almost certain it would happen at a greater pace overseas. With that, she closed her notebook and prayed a blessing over us as she said farewell.

It took several days to process this. After all, both of us have been called as young people to foreign missions. Where had we missed God's will? What would we do now?

As we prayed, I recalled a chapel speaker from the Home Mission Board. In my notes I had written a statement he made: "Two thousand miles of bathwater does not make a missionary."

As we shared our hearts together, we realized any community that needed Jesus was a mission field.

I immediately contacted the Home Mission Board in Atlanta and offered our services for an assignment in the United States to serve as a church planter. We were surprised that our correspondence was answered by a telephone call. A. B. Cash explained he directed the Pioneer Missions Division. He had been praying for a couple to go to Middletown, Pennsylvania to Pastor the Valley Baptist Church, planted by a businessman. A small church building had been erected but not finished, and the need was urgent.

I immediately flew to Harrisburg. I was amazed that God was sending me to minister a handful of miles from Shamokin!

I met with Frank, the volunteer who had started the church. I learned he had moved from Georgia to dispatch trucks for his corporation in the northeastern U.S. Frustrated that there were no Southern Baptist churches in the area, he chased cars with Georgia license plates to gather Southern Baptists. He had not actually formed a church; he had formed a "Y'all Club." The nearby Olmstead Air Force Base was filled with southerners.

I met his wife and discovered she was mentally ill, smoking two cigarettes at the same time. When speaking to truckers on the phone he used foul language, which disappointed me. There were more negative than positives about this situation. I was hesitant to accept the assignment.

The second day, I chose to have my lunch alone in Middletown at Kuppy's Diner, a converted railroad car. The menu was filled with Pennsylvania Dutch dishes. I listened carefully to the joshing and chatting between the diners as they sat in the booths and counter. I was listening to people who took God's name in vain with almost every sentence. Even the women swore and cracked dirty jokes. The Holy Spirit said, "Ralph, do you see a mission field here?"

I flew home and helped Ruth pack to move to Middletown, Pennsylvania.



We were able to sell our house quickly. We invested the profit from it by purchasing a large split-level home in our Pennsylvania mission field. As we settled in, Frank was transferred and moved away.

I entered the unfinished one-room church building and went down the basement stairs. The foundation had not been waterproofed and the floor had an inch of water sitting on it. It was necessary for me to start not with people, but by completing the structure.

In front of the building, a trailer park housed over 100 people. On the edge of it, facing the main road, was a small stand selling hamburgers. Frank had led a 16-year-old girl named Martha who worked there to accept the Lord. She adored him. He was the closest thing to a father she had ever known. Her mother was a prostitute.

She deeply resented me as his replacement. When I ordered a hamburger from her, she packed it with hot peppers. She had an angry face as she watched me bite into it.

I knew I would have to earn her trust. Gradually as she heard me teach and preach, she accepted me. She smoked heavily and often swore like a sailor. She still attended the Sunday worship service.

I had rallied several members of the church to assist me in sheet rocking the interior. As I was working on that project, the telephone rang. It was a call from the hospital in Harrisburg: Ruth had just had a head-on collision on a hilly road and was admitted with injuries. She had been wearing slippers that got caught in the pedals. She left her front teeth in the steering wheel. My mother came to care for the children and attend to her needs.

We partitioned a space in the building for a Pastor's study. I filled bookcases with a library given to me earlier by Dr. Paul Maddox and an equal number of volumes collected during my seminary years. In that room I would have a powerful experience with the Holy Spirit.

In that period, I studied Middletown population statistics. There were exactly 742 homes in the city limits. With nothing else to do, I determined to knock on every single door and introduce myself as a new Pastor in town. I did so, starting at 10 a.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. Through this, many people began to attend the Sunday services.

When I knocked on the door of one very large home in the center of town, a maid answered. When I told her who I was and that I would like to meet her employer, she rolled her eyes and said, "Does she ever need you!!"

I was ushered into a stately living room. Soon Posey Leggore, dressed in a gown, greeted me. I must have spent well over an hour listening to her pour out her heart about the extended family living in that mansion.

Her husband was president of the local bank. Although Lutheran by background, they had no knowledge at all the New Birth experience. She promised they would visit our services.

Our small parking lot in front of the church had gravel, not blacktop. I can still remember the sound the tires crunching on it as a large Cadillac carrying the entire Leggore family came to worship the first time.

Posey and her three children accepted Christ and were baptized. Russell called me to meet in his bank office. He shared his intention to commit suicide. He had not paid Federal income tax for 15 years and expected to be arrested at any moment. He would be disgraced before the whole town!

I suggested he confer with a tax attorney I had used to register the church as a nonprofit. The appointment produced a plan for him to pay the debt monthly, to be kept confidential. No one, even his wife, ever knew about this. He also now accepted Christ.

Martha's mother became more and more angry at Martha for refusing to join her in her "trade." One day, Martha returned from high school to her mother's apartment. Into the slush and wet snow, her mother had thrown out of the second-story window all her clothes. They were in the snow and slush on the road.

Martha became catatonic, a nervous breakdown. She had been taken to a hospital by the police, who called me. I visited her immediately and then spoke with her doctor. He told me a family must be found to take her in, that she could no longer live with her mother. I responded that I did not know anyone at that moment who could do so, but I would work on it.

With a cynical expression, the psychiatrist said, "Well, Revverrend!, what's wrong with your home?!!"

After consulting with Ruth, we brought Martha to live with us. I specified she could not smoke in the house and must never curse in front of the boys.

For a few weeks we struggled with her sullen presence. She was sarcastic, filled with pain. Then she slipped out and came back drunk.

Her psychiatrist gave me a suggestion. I rented a room at a boarding house in Highspire. I then ordered her to pack every single one of her belongings and get in my car.

As we drove to Highspire, I explained to her that if she wanted to be on her own, I would not stand in her way. She had the first month of free rent paid on a place to stay. I would come back exactly one week to the hour of her being dropped off.

If she wanted our love and our support, she was welcome to come back to live in our house. On the other hand, if she wanted to continue to live her own life her own way, she could do so.

I stated I would drive by the boarding house in exactly one week to the very minute she got out of the car. If she was not sitting on the porch with her suitcase, I would drive on and she would never be welcomed in our home again.

That was a miserable week for me and for her! We prayed frequently with the boys for her.

True to my word, I timed my arrival to drive exactly 7 days later. Martha was sitting on the porch! When we returned to our home, she embraced Ruth and we saw her weep for the first time. From then on, she lived with us until she graduated from high school. We then enrolled her in a practical nurse training program and celebrated her graduation.

Another part of Martha's story includes a young man who lived directly across the street from us. He repaired washing machines in his two car garage all day long. At night he threw wild parties, so wild that sometimes nude couples were chasing each other across his lawn. Since our boy's bedroom windows allowed that to be seen, we made sure their venetian blinds were always closed.

From time to time, I would walk over to talk to him while he worked. I learned he had been raised in an orphanage in central Pennsylvania. He had never attended a church in his life. He was a lost soul trying to survive in the best way he knew how to live.

When I thought the time was right, I walked over and asked him,

"Bob, do you know how to pray?"

"Nope."

"That is so sad! Every American should know how to pray. Would you like me to teach you?"

"Sure!"

"Okay. Let's go up to your living room and kneel together at your couch."

When we were on our knees, I said,

"Now, repeat after me: Dear Lord . . ."

"Dear Lord, . . ."

"This is Bob . . ."

"This is Bob . . ."

"I don't give a damn about you!"

He was stunned. He jumped to his feet and said,

"I can't say that to God!"

"Bob, I have heard you take his name in vain many times in your garage. He already knows what you think of Him. And I would not wear your shoes if I could, because the man wearing them is going to spend eternity in hell. Think it over."

With that I left him.

The following Sunday as the service started, he slipped in and sat next to the aisle on the back row. I confess I changed the sermon I had prepared. I shared about the suffering Savior on the cross and the love of God and what it meant to live in the joy of salvation.

As we stood to sing the invitation, he took one step into the aisle and then stepped back. I walked straight back to him, held out my hand, and offered to walk with him to the front. There we kneeled together once again. This time, I let him in a prayer of confession. It was a glorious moment!

After that, he would often come to visit us and have a slice of apple pie. He and Martha fell in love, and I had the joy of marrying them. Two broken lives became one in Christ.



Gary Fields was a civilian working at the airbase near Middletown. He and Irma had grown up in Tennessee. I ordained him as a deacon and would frequently visit him on Saturday mornings to spend time alone in prayer in his living room. Irma was the leader for the Women's Missionary Union meetings. She seemed to be formal, sometimes even bristling when I talked to her. I could not understand this, so I sought to ignore it.

One Sunday, very pregnant with their second child, she surprised me by responding to the invitation for those who desired to receive salvation. As I started to greet her, she said,

“Ralph, don't ask me to sit down!”

I had no idea what she meant by this! Something prompted me to invite her to share her heart with the congregation. She said,

“When I was eight years old in Memphis, my mother told me to go down to the front and get saved. When I did, the preacher smiled and motioned to me to sit down in the front row. When the invitation was over, he had me stand up and asked everyone to vote for Irma to become a member, that she had just accepted Jesus and needed to be voted into the membership. That was it!”

She continued to share that she felt she had to work hard in the church to be a good Christian. She joined the Girl's Auxiliary, sang in the choir, then became active in the Women's Missionary Union. She truly thought that was all it meant to be a Christian. When I began to come to the home and she listened to the passionate prayers of her husband and me, only then did she realize she was not truly born again.

She turned to me and explained that now she understood that her being told to “sit down” as a little child had robbed her of her joy. She could no longer want to be jealous of her husband and me. She was walking away from churchianity to fully expect Christ as her Lord. Irma became a completely different person from that time on!

I feel it is mandatory that I include this illustration in this document. Irma Fields represents tens of thousands of people who know churchianity but do not know the joy of salvation.



Another couple in the Valley Baptist Church had a baby girl born with a hole in her heart. The doctors felt she should wait for her third birthday before surgery would be performed. The precious child would stop and lay down while playing, to rest her heart. She often came to hug her Pastor. I loved her dearly. Her father was a traveling shoe salesman. The couple sacrificed “extras” constantly to collect enough money for the expensive heart operation she would need.

At the appointed time, they took her to Philadelphia for the surgery and I went with them. We prayed together with this child just before entering surgery and remained in the waiting room for several hours. Finally, the doctor came to sadly tell us that she had died on the table. I was overwhelmed with grief. I struggled to gain my composure; I was the Pastor, present to comfort the parents and I had to do my duty. I turned to look out the window, fighting back tears, expecting to pray with the couple.

Instead, they both put their arms on my shoulders and comforted me, saying I should not grieve. They shared they had dedicated that little girl to Jesus before she was born, and they knew they would see her again. I sensed they were more mature in Christ than I was at that moment.



I was not sent by the Home Mission Board to simply Pastor Valley Baptist Church. I was commissioned to plant churches in all central Pennsylvania.

Just south of Middletown was Elizabethtown. A medical doctor and his family contacted me to help them develop a congregation. I secured a Lodge Hall to conduct services on Sundays.

The Elizabethtown Baptist Church was formed. I now preached twice each Sunday in two churches.

Next, a farmer in Camp Hill offered me an empty farmhouse for services. It was later named the Country and Town Baptist Church. He alone influenced nearly 50 people to attend the worship services. I now preached three times each Sunday, devoting a day a week to visit people in each area.

Ken Estep was supported by the Home Mission Board to Pastor the Elizabethtown congregation. Months later, Larry Stewart came from seminary to the Camp Hill church. This freed me up to plant with an army officer who came to attend the War college in Carlisle. Gradually this church developed, and a third Pastor was added.

On October 13, 1962, the four churches formed the Keystone Baptist Association. A. B. Cash, my supervisor from Atlanta, came to officiate. He was a man with a gruff voice, a cigar smoker, with little ability to preach. By then he had visited me several times. He had one sermon repeated over and over: "Jesus Christ, The Same Yesterday, Today and Forever."

I booked the two of us to speak at each church on one Sunday to celebrate the occasion. The Valley Baptist Church came first. He did not remember they had already heard that message from him as he repeated it.

The Elizabethtown church came next, same sermon. We sped down the Pennsylvania Turnpike to Camp Hill.

I stood up as the first speaker and gave his message verbatim. I had to force myself not to laugh as he squiggled in his seat. He stood up and fumbled through some remarks. When we got in the car to go to Carlisle, he told me if I ever did that again I would be fired on the spot! All I could do was laugh. He never used that message again in the many services we spent together after that.



Very soon after I arrived in Middletown, I sought for a way to reach the region by radio broadcasting. Time on long wave (AM) radio stations were too expensive.

I discovered Lancaster, Pennsylvania was launching an FM station, WDAC. While it was a secular station, it had Christian owners. They had plenty of airtime to fill!

I was unsure of how many listeners I would have. FM was new and required a special radio receiver. Fortunately, many families purchased sets because the FM signal was static free.

I proposed two daily radio broadcasts, one at 10 A.M. called "Coffee Break" and one at noon to be called "Dinner Bell," each 30 minutes long. I was on the air free of charge!

I secured from my father his extra radio equipment. I set it up in the little Pastor's study at Valley Baptist Church. I used the same format used by my father for generations on Morning Sunshine: recorded hymns, Christian poems, short devotions. On Dinner Bell I included Pennsylvania Dutch recipes, to be submitted by radio listeners.

Each program began with sound effects. Coffee was poured into a cup for the first one and a dinner bell clanged for the second one. I produced a full week of taped programs every Monday and drove the tapes to the Lancaster station.

As a result, on Sunday nights people from all over the region came to the Valley Baptist Church to hear me preach. Even the Amish community produced visitors, one coming in a horse drawn buggy!

The deacons became frustrated with all the visitors who didn't join the church. Church members could not always find seats. They insisted I stop broadcasting!

I called the manager of WDAC and explained I might have to stop broadcasting for a short time. They should plan to temporarily fill my time with music. As listeners called in to complain the program had been deleted, the station was to rotate the names and telephone numbers of the five deacons, suggesting further information was available from these phone numbers!

The following Saturday, the deacons met with me and sheepishly apologized. The broadcasts began again the following Monday!



The Elizabethtown church was visited by a young farmer from the York Area. He wanted to start a church and affiliate with the Keystone association. I begin to work with him. Still in another area close to the Maryland border became open for a church plant. I reported this on my monthly statement to A. B. Cash. I received a phone call from him:

‘Neighbour, you are starting too many churches too fast. My budget cannot keep up with this. I need you to slow down for at least a year.’

I could not believe my ears! I did not just reply; I erupted!

“I wonder what the apostle Paul would have said if he had been given orders to stop extending the kingdom of God!” I slammed it down the phone.

About two hours later, Dr. Cash was again calling me. He indicated he had plenty of funds available in his budget for eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Long Island. Would I be willing to move and continue my ministry in that area? Of course, I quickly agreed.

We secured a lovely apartment in the basement of a huge home in New Brunswick. Ralph and Rodney enjoyed the wooded areas surrounding us. I began to travel the large territory, planting churches in eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Long Island, and Westchester County, New York.

My own travel budget did not allow me to stay in motels. Only gasoline could be submitted for payment. My workaround was to make friends at a few of the gas stations where I regularly filled up. In the evenings they would let me sleep in my car as they closed their garage doors. In the morning I would use the men’s toilet to wash up and continue on my way.



The home Mission Board sent a strategist to coach me on how to plant in major urban areas. He was a brilliant man who flew his own two-seat airplane. I learned all about population pyramids, etc., seeing the potential in planting urban churches to penetrate specific population segments. A whole new world was opening to me. His mentoring has allowed me to pass on to hundreds of Cell Group Pastors the importance of doing a thorough strategic survey to find responsive population segments.

Philadelphia was my first challenge. I rented a chapel in a YWCA and started Sunday evening worship services. I populated it from residents living in high-rise apartment buildings. I invested time befriending uniformed doormen guarding their entrances. After chatting long enough to trust me, each doorman would share about all the sorrows poured out to him by residents. I learned many of them shifted to new locations after about two years, to avoid troubled people.

Through them, I was able to put notices in elevators about the service in the nearby YWCA. This snagged a godly young woman who was an interior decorator.

Little did I know she would plant a strategy in my mind that I would also teach all over the world. She explained to me that many apartment units were rented by low salaried secretaries. They would share the rental costs between four or five women. With few funds to decorate their fancy apartment, she offered free classes on the elevator bulletin boards, a “How To” course for decorating on a limited budget.

Through her, we had access to many high-rise apartments. Low-cost burlap curtains dyed the right color, small tables consisting of a circular cardboard top perched on a box hidden by a

fabric that draped to the floor. Used furniture stripped and repainted. A community of new believers developed as a result.

The Home Mission Board notified me that a row house in Philadelphia had been donated from the estate of an elderly woman, available for whatever I could use it for. When I visited it, I discovered the last occupant had been mentally ill. To keep demons away, five or 6 inches of newspaper had been nailed to the walls in the largest room. It took a great deal of work to put it back in usable condition.

I planted three volunteer students there who came for the summer from the Baptist college in Mississippi. The second floor became their living quarters. The first floor became a center for holding events for the young people of the area, a terrible slum community.

Carcasses of stripped cars were on the streets; large sewer rats wandered at night; gang activities, drugs and prostitution were everywhere. I regularly coached them to conduct appropriate ministry activities.



During the last year or so of my ministry as an Area Director for the Home Mission Board, my first two trips overseas stand out in my memory.

The first one was a trip I made with Vander Warner, a dynamic Pastor in Maryland. Since neither one of us had traveled overseas, we decided to make a trip to Haiti. We had located a Christian psychiatrist there named Glodys St. Phard. At the time “Papa Doc” was the cruel dictator.

When we left the Port-au-Prince airport, we were shocked to see a man hanging from the flagpole in the parking lot. We soon learned that our host, Dr. St. Phard, was not only a doctor but also working with the underground seeking to overthrow the President. He used the excuse of showing us the city to make contacts with others in the group.

He also exposed us to the tragedy of the babies in the hospital. His wife was a gynecologist and gave us a midnight tour of the babies there. Starvation had brought many children to her ward. An eight- year-old girl was so small I could ring her arm between my closed thumb and middle finger.

He then introduced us to the wife of a widowed Pastor. Her husband was teaching about the return of Christ to reign over all the nations, including Haiti. The President had organized a bunch of thugs called the *Ton Ton Macout*. One of them stood up in the back row and shot him through the heart crying, “There is no ruler but Papa Doc!”

She introduced us to three children who had been orphaned as these thugs murdered their parents while they hid underneath the house. The neighbors were so afraid of reprisal they would not help them. She was secretly caring for them. Vander and I decided we would sponsor an orphanage for her and other children. We devised a name: R.E.A.C.H. (Resources for The Education of All the Children of Haiti). Glódy's suggested the name would pass inspection by the government.

We took the few dollars we had and gave them to her. Later, we forwarded funds as God provided. Eventually we were able to turn this project to a wonderful Mennonite community to carry it forward.

The second trip took me to Jamaica in 1966. Brilliant pulpiteer Dr. Leo H. Rhynie was Pastor of the East Queen Street Baptist Church in Kingston. He was black, married to a Godly white woman. He had powerful members of his church in the nation's government. I was to conduct a week-long series of evangelistic sermons.

His church had been erected during the previous century by the British. Using Anglican customs, a gallery surrounded the main floor. At the level of the gallery was the pulpit. A ladder led up to it. From that prominent position I began to preach.

God began to work! Convert after convert came during the invitations. The crowd swelled beyond the capacity of the building. Loudspeakers were mounted on the outside walls. Funeral parlors loaned folding chairs that were set up on East Queen St., blocked off in both directions.

The time was extended to a second week of meetings, then a third. At the close, Dr. Rhynie announced that all new converts who had never been baptized or who had never been married by the church would be required to do so. A mass wedding with several hundred couples, many of them standing with grown children, repeated their vows. It took two full days to baptize all the converts.

During this time, Hailie Selassie flew in. The Jamaican Rastafarian sect believed he was an earthly manifestation of God and flooded the runway.

A government official presented an invitation to Dr. Rhynie to attend a government reception for the King. I listened from the living room as the official was told the minister could not possibly accept the invitation, because he had a very famous American as his guest who would be offended if he were not also invited. Within an hour I received an engraved invitation!

This meant being fitted for a formal tuxedo, a careful orientation by a government official about the way to genuflect before the king when I met him. The occasion took place as he sat on the throne in the soccer stadium and one by one, scores of people genuflected before him as he waved back. It was quite an experience!



In 1963, I was exposed to a ministry in Washington, D.C. as I read Elizabeth Conner's Call to Commitment. I was becoming frustrated by the lack of maturity I was observing among Baptists and was deeply impressed by what she wrote about The Church of Our Savior.

They had established a coffeehouse and a ministry that involved totally committed believers. As I read through the book for the second time, I knew I had to revise much of my thinking about church life. I made a trip to D. C., submerging myself in the community for several days.

I realized for the first time the missing ingredient in Baptist life was authentic community. I also recognized that it could not exist unless those communities formed home groups, patterning the original body of Christ in the book of Acts.

As I now reflect on this, I realize God had waited until that time in my journey to fully expose my eyes to a truth I could not have comprehended earlier. It was absolutely a major turning point in my life and ministry. Like many others in this period, I was sensing radical revisions had to be made to American church life. I also learned at this time about the Faith at Work movement that focused on the importance of small groups witnessing in the marketplace.

PART 3: EVANGELISM MINISTRY 1964 – 1969

In 1964, I was invited to serve as Director of Personal Evangelism for the Texas Baptist General Convention. Dr. Wade Freeman had collected a team where each man was assigned a different area of evangelism. Byron Richardson led Revival Evangelism, Rudy Hernandez, Spanish Evangelism and Theron (Corky) Farris, Campus and Clinic Evangelism.

I soon learned that with 5000 churches participating in the convention, only 100 of them had baptized more than 100 converts in a year. The ratio of Baptist Church members to a single baptism was 129:1.

Clearly, church members were not trained or equipped to win the lost. I began to realize the structure of all church programs did not include a single area of evangelism, except for an annual or semiannual "Revival Meeting." A visiting evangelist would preach and visit during the day with the Pastor. The two would primarily visit unsaved husbands of women members. I engaged heavily in this activity for my first year, recognizing that buttonholing was a poor way of sharing the message of salvation. Cultivation evangelism was hardly understood.

In addition, I was frustrated because Sunday School and Training Union and other auxiliary programs had little or no focus on winning the lost to Christ. If personal evangelism were to happen, it had to be something imposed as an outside activity into ongoing church life. At the time, regional Baptist Associations were very active in sponsoring special events for the affiliated congregations. I saw this as the only wedge into the system.

I developed Personal Evangelism Institutes. Overhead projectors with plastic transparencies were used at that time. I carefully prepared sets to be sure the same content would be presented every time.

A Friday night session would train believers to share their testimony in one minute of time. The Saturday session would provide a diagram that would explain the plan of salvation. This would be presented by teams of two Pastors.

Every person was given a piece of red ribbon and a pin. The strategy was to wear it on the chest wherever the Christian went. When asked what the ribbon was for, the answer would be "I'd like to tell you about the greatest thing that ever happened to me in my life!" After sharing their one-minute testimony they were to ask, "Has this ever happened to you?" If a person desired to know more, they were equipped in the second session to share the plan of salvation. Using this strategy, hundreds of thousands of Baptists began to witness.

In Tyler, Texas we finished the first night where everyone learned to share their one-minute testimony. One young mother lived outside of town on a country road. Across the road, her best friend, also a young mother, had not yet gone to bed when she came home from the meeting. She decided to go over and practice on her.

When she finished her testimony and asked her if this had ever happened to her, the friend began to cry, saying she desired to give her life to Christ but did not know what to do.

When I arrived at the church for the second day, the lady trained the previous night was sitting on the front steps of the church waiting for me. She scolded me! She shared I had left her hanging, not knowing what to do! I assured her that in this session she would be equipped. That night, she had her first convert.

I formed twenty teams of forty Pastors and trained them for three days. We then launched the Institutes covering every Association. I used two Pastors to a team so each one could be studying his transparency while the other spoke.

Pastor Bill Beckham invited me to teach the course in the First Baptist Church of Omaha, Texas. Neither of us knew at that time God was preparing us to work together closely in later years. As we travel together a bond was being formed. His ministry in East Texas had caused him to take a stand about racial segregation. I had taken a similar stand. When I arrived in Texas, I found the Baptist Building was segregated with separate dining rooms and toilets and drinking fountains for employees. Both of us won battles in this area.



Because of my experience with Billy Graham in crusade work, I proposed that Dr. Freeman add to my responsibilities Crusade Evangelism. We developed a logo and called the crusades "Encounters." I wrote a detailed Crusade Manual and a small book to be used in the counselor

training, Witness, Take the Stand! Associations were the perfect structure to sponsor these week-long stadium meetings.

During that time, I met two Pastors in central Texas who bonded closely with me: Roy Edgemon and Bill Hogue. The night before their crusade started in Odessa, we drove into the prairie and prayed for several hours together. Bill was made aware at that time that God had something very important he would do in the future. We set him apart, laying hands on him, for whatever it might be.

Roy Edgemon went on to direct Church Training for the denomination from Nashville.

Bill Hogue became Executive Director of the California Southern Baptist State Convention.

The crusades in Texas caught the attention of other state conventions. Soon I was helping Alabama and Ohio set up the crusades. I was also sent to Puerto Rico to assist them.



I was invited to speak in North Carolina to the state evangelism conference. The featured speaker was Corrie Ten Boom, author of *The Hiding Place*.

Her faith had been refined through concentration camp experiences and the loss of her family. The two of us chatted backstage during the preliminaries. I noticed that when I spoke with her, her lips would move as though she was whispering. Puzzled by this, I finally said, “Miss Corrie, was there something you wanted to say to me? I saw your lips moving.” She replied, “Ach, no. I was just talking to Jesus about what we were discussing.”

This godly woman lived in the presence of her Lord continually, praying without ceasing! It revealed to me that I needed to seek new levels of intimacy with God.

It was not long after that J. C. Mitchell invited me to lead a citywide evangelistic crusade in Harrisonburg, Virginia. As I presented the first message, I became convicted that I needed to have a deeper intimacy with God for the messages to be anointed.

I entered my hotel room and threw the key under the bed, determined not to leave until I encountered God at the level revealed to me by Corrie Ten Boom. Through the night, I wrestled with my desire to know Him. Paul’s plea became mine: “. . . that I might know Him, and the power of his resurrection.”

The Holy Spirit began to point out clogging areas in my life. I faced issues that needed to be cleansed within me. Tears of repentance flowed. Early in the morning, I began to experience the weight of His glory! It was so powerful as I stretched prostrate on the floor, I thought I could not catch my next breath. A fresh anointing of His presence filled my soul.

That series of citywide meetings reaped a great harvest. At the close, we called all the Pastors together for a final recap. I shared a testimony of what I had just experienced with them and asked everyone to get on their knees and seek a deeper walk with God. For several minutes we knelt in dead silence. Then one Pastor began to cry aloud, “Oh, God!” Something broke loose and the Spirit fell upon the men. Confessions were shared across the room.

J. C. and I were kneeling side by side on a front pew as men begin to confess jealousy and secret sin. About midnight, J.C. turned to me and said, “Ralph, I have never experienced anything like this before. What should I do?”

I told him to wait until the Spirit stopped working. About 3 A.M., a Pastor went to the piano and began to play a praise song. We worshipped for a long time.



During those years, I became more and more burdened by fact that church structures were not even close to being biblical, although everyone bragged that they were. The priesthood of all believers was a theological teaching not at all implemented.

I walked the floor, beginning to realize I had to get more involved in changing the denomination. I began to talk with Pastors, sharing my burden for a radical revision to a denomination that was no longer an organism.

Even though most agreed something should be done, I repeatedly heard the same hesitant response to get involved. One young Pastor, standing in the moonlight with me, set it this way: ‘I have a wife and two kids and a mortgage on our house. I cannot afford to participate in anything so risky.’”

My family knew how I felt. I began to write a manifesto that would be nicknamed “The Redbook” because that was the color of the three-ring binder containing its 72 pages.

I gathered my two sons around me and explained that for me to do what I needed to do I might have to resign, take a job perhaps as a professor in a college. I would create enough converts to form a church that would be built on the book of Acts instead of Nashville. My son Ralph said that if I did so, he would go to work to help support the family. He was still in high school!

I was the stated preacher for an Encounter Crusade in Snyder, Texas. All the churches of the area were cooperating. As I sat on the platform for the last night listening to the large choir sing before I preached, I heard the voice of the Holy Spirit whisper to me, “Ralph, this is the end for you. You will resign and begin the life’s work I have been preparing you for all these years.”

I returned to Dallas to learn a small group in Houston had contacted the office for a supply preacher. They wanted to begin a new church in the western edge of the city. I flew down to meet with them in the home of Paul and Betty Lou Martin. They had rented the Meadow Wood Elementary school for Sunday morning services to be held in the cafeteria area.

They invited me back. Then again, a third invitation. At that time, I explained to them what God had put on my heart. We begin to pray together. They printed copies of the Redbook and we further conversed about what an experimental church would look like.

They extended an invitation for me to become their Pastor. I carefully explained I did not want to talk about the salary because it was insignificant compared to their pledge to walk with me into the new lifestyle of doing a church built around cell groups.

When I resigned from my position, I was not prepared for the response I got. I had been very honest about my frustration with the programs that hindered equipping believers for ministry.

I shared with my colleagues in the Evangelism Division my desire to become a parable church amid Baptist life. It would provide a working model of New Testament life as demonstrated in the book of Acts. I would not begin with any of the structured programs endorsed by the denomination. The department heads of the state convention were highly threatened by the news.

My closing weeks waiting for departure time were painful. Riding the elevator to my office was done in total silence. The news leaked to the Fort Worth Association where I went to speak. One of the leading Pastors who had been a dear friend stood to his feet and angrily chastened me as a rebellious maverick.

The Director of the Men’s Brotherhood pulled me aside and shared with me that it took five hard knocks before the best came out in a man, and this might be my first one. From his vantage point he could be sympathetic, unlike the rest.

PART 4: SPIRITUAL FORMATION 1969 – 1982

West Memorial Baptist Church: “The People Who Care;” Singapore 1”

I had friends at the Home Mission Board. I knew they occasionally sponsored men who wanted to develop church plants using new methods. With my fingers crossed, I wrote them a letter asking for subsidy to study at the Sunday School Board. I wanted to be mentored on how to form an experimental church. They granted me subsidy to spend a full month in Nashville.

Leaving my family in our new home, I checked into a hotel. I was interviewed by a brilliant man who secretly felt as I did that radical change needed to come to the convention. We began to have conversations sitting by his swimming pool until 2 o'clock in the mornings.

He introduced me to Eric Hoffer's book, *The Ordeal of Change*. I was given an intensive personality evaluation. I was frankly told that I had too much empathy to take on the role of a change maker. I was not thick-skinned enough to handle serious conflict!

I determined to forge ahead anyway. That month challenged me in every possible way, opening my vision to the cost it would take to live on the edge as a Change Agent.

A breakfast meeting was arranged for me to talk with W. O. House, the mind behind the entire structure of the denomination. He had written a book, "*The Program Based Design*," to explain why each church program was necessary. At the time I spoke with him, I had no idea that I was attacking everything in his strategy.

When I finished, he said to me, "Ralph, a Southern Baptist Pastor who leaves our seminary is like a man who has had a brick wall built solidly around his body to hold him up, no matter what might happen to him. What you are proposing will tear away all those bricks and he will be unable to stand alone.

Be very careful. Consider what the consequences might be for what you may change in the denomination!"

I immediately thought back to all the Pastors I had talk to in Texas about helping me bring change to the programmed church. His words just explained why they were so fearful. Our seminaries not only taught theology: they also taught a brick wall of structured programs that left no room to wiggle!

With that I flew home, excited to begin my journey with a team of people I thought were completely committed to my vision.



In September of 1969 I began to Pastor the West Memorial Baptist Church. We never used that title. Our advertising and publicity referred to us only as "The People Who Care." I also asked that my advertised title would be "Coach," not "Pastor."

We purchased a new home in west Houston and converted the two-car garage into an office. An entire wall was filled with my books. Two desks placed side by side supplied space for me and Marie Kirk, my faithful secretary for many years. We had no plans at this point to erect any sort of church building.

As we unloaded furniture, Father Tinney from nearby St. John Vianney Church drove up. Shaking my hand, he explained we were the first two Pastors in West Houston and should be friends. We did so, often having lunch at his manse on Mondays. I even took my sons to his 7 A.M. Sunday mass. He occasionally attended our Sunday evening service at Meadow Wood School. While we never discussed this in depth, I sensed he also saw the need for equipping the laity to be ministers.

That first year attracted much attention. The Houston Chronicle ran a big ad with my picture and a story about an experimental church that would exist without walls. Many people began to gather at the Meadow Wood Elementary school for Sunday services.

We took the 78 people comprising the fellowship for a weekend in Galveston to hammer out our statement of faith. I had made it very clear that we were going to pioneer a new lifestyle where every member would be considered a minister. Every house would be considered a church and would be open for group gatherings.

A young couple carpeted their garage floor and began to work with teenagers. I created blue jackets with our church logo for the three deacons I had inherited from other Baptist churches.

Every Friday night I took them with me, first one by one, and then by teams, to visit all the taverns on the west side of town. I was determined to demonstrate to Southern Baptists a fresh model of church life by creating a parable church in their midst.

In June of 1970, the Foreign Mission Board sent me to Vietnam to explain my new concepts. The missionaries were very receptive in spite of the fact that the nation was in the middle of a terrible battle.

When I returned in mid-July, I discovered a group of members were beginning to object to my strategy. One woman was concerned that when her daughter would be married, we would not have a beautiful stain-glassed auditorium.

One of my deacons came to see me, explaining his wife insisted on returning to a conventional church. She threatened to divorce him if he did not accompany her! He sadly handed me a large check and said farewell.

Even as we began to add members, this division between tradition-minded Baptists and those who had caught my vision became obvious. In the fall of 1970, actress Jeanette Clift had formed a ministry to win aspiring young actors. I invited her to use our group on Sunday mornings for them to present skits. We did many creative things in the community, but the division in philosophy cast a cloud on everything.

We constituted the Baptist mission into a Baptist church on January 1, 1971. I did so with a heavy heart, realizing my calling from God would not allow me to compromise my vision.

Soon after, I resigned, feeling the group would be better off moving back into tradition. I once again considered I might secure a secular position teaching in a university and start with pure pagans won to Christ, who had no traditions to follow.

I was recognizing two things. First, the evaluation I had received about my own personality in Nashville was correct. I was not tough enough to split a congregation. Second, I was affirming to myself that I did not own a vision: the version totally owned me! I would follow it, no matter what sacrifice was required.

I had purchased lake property years before near Dallas and planned to move the family there and begin an itinerant ministry. God changed my plans.

Jack Taylor was Pastoring the Castle Hills Baptist Church in San Antonio. He brought an evangelist to preach from New Orleans. The two of them visited a strip tease bar near the airbase.

The Evangelist asked Guy Linton, the owner, if he could preach between the nude's dancing sessions. Thinking it would be a good comedy, he was given permission.

After the second cycle, Linton announced on the loudspeaker for all employees to come to the cash register. He paid the band, dancers, and waitresses their full salaries. He then announced his bar was closing forever! He had just accepted Christ as his savior. His wife Evelyn, who had taught many girls how to strip, was also converted on the spot.

God broke loose a true move of his Spirit in San Antonio! Evelyn determined to win every girl to Christ she had taught how to dance naked. Jack Taylor found himself with mass conversions from the converts of tavern employees. The church choir included former dancers and bouncers.

Because we had known each other for years, he beckoned me to join his staff and assist him in the revival ministry.

Leaving our home on Broadgreen filled with furniture but on the market for sale, our family went to work with Jack. My son Ralph was in his senior year of high school. It was very disruptive for my sons.

The Lintons had a party-house outside of town with large mirrors on the ceilings of the bedrooms and red walls. It was very luxurious. They offered it to our family, and we moved in. Thus began a short interval of training God had for me.

A striking blonde who had been converted from stripping to salvation was singing in the choir. Her husband owned a carnival that traveled the state of Texas, usually sponsored by a

Catholic church. He had a very sarcastic view of the clergy. He was certain that his wife had been duped and sought to expose her to the fakery of the church life. He sat in front of me in the services taking notes to persuade her to defect.

The Lintons invited all the former employees to go to the party-house on Sunday afternoons for fried chicken. On one of those occasions, I was sitting in a side room watching a cowboy football game with this skeptical husband.

Evelyn, my wife, and Jack's wife were praying with a young stripper, not yet converted, in a separate room. She dashed into our room with mascara dripping down her cheeks. She slid onto the lap of the skeptical husband she had known for a long time, weeping; "Sandy Sin (her stage name) has just become Sandy Saved."

That became the breaking point for this husband. He confessed Christ that day. Later he sold his carnival and went to study at Southwestern Baptist theological seminary.

In my absence, the congregation invited a missionary from Hong Kong who had returned on furlough to become Pastor. After a few months, they discovered in addition to his wife and four children, he had a Chinese mistress he had imported into an apartment nearby. This was discovered in late September. He was summarily fired.

Betty Lou Martin called me on the telephone to share with me details. She and her husband Paul had been totally committed to my vision from the very hour we met. She told me that during the business meeting to fire this man, psychiatrist Dr. Juanita Hart Robertson stood to address the group.

She indicated that the church could not continue split down the middle. For herself, she fully intended to endorse Ralph's vision. She stated it was time to end the struggle.

She directed the members to take some time to discuss among the family units whether they would depart and join a traditional church or remain as a remnant.

She directed all those returning to a traditional church to stand against one wall as she stood against the opposite wall. They sang "*God Be with You, Till We Meet Again*" and dismissed the meeting. As I recall, about 35 people stood at the wall with Dr. Hart.

I returned to Pastor the church for the second time in 1972. Fortunately, our house had not sold, and we moved back in. Steve Collins, Director of Rosewood Hospital, took me aside. He shared advice that became permanently embedded in my memory.

He explained that if a heavy object smashed a hole in a sidewalk, the hole would be immediately evident. But as rains and weather attacked the hole, loose pieces clinging to the sides would fall into it. He knew that more people would leave. It slowly happened in the years following. His advice carried me through those times.

Ray Graham lived miles away but fell in love with the vision. He owned men's clothing stores in Houston and Austin. He and Mildred became close friends. He was totally committed to investing his wealth in the Kingdom.

When we needed to add a second Pastor, he funded Harold Tate for his first year. He also threw himself into the church to the point he built a home closer to the church!

I wanted to have a television program that would explain our special lifestyle. The title we selected to name the church was T.O.U.C.H.: "Transforming Others Under Christ's Hand."

I suggested we create a format of an informal family gathering and call the TV program "The Touch Family." Ray funded this project that cost several thousand dollars for airtime on Channel 39. It was broadcast every Sunday morning for two years at 8:30 AM.

Because studio time was 50% cheaper in a small TV station in Beaumont, we drove three cars of people including children to record the broadcast there. We had a clown, special music, interviews, and above all an appeal for unbelievers to follow Christ.

We soon became known across Houston as *The People Who Care*. A Catholic nun in Pasadena sent a Methodist couple to me for counseling. When I asked her why she did so, she indicated that she trusted us to care for them; our reputation through the TV program had impacted her.

Ron and Patricia Owens were invited by me to come to Houston and become a part of our church. We had first met in 1969 on the campus of Baylor University where I spoke, and they sang. They were an integral part of the video ministry. They also appeared on *Carpool*; the weekday radio program aired on KHCB. We became very close during that time and until this time. Ron owned a hotel in Château d'OEx, Switzerland we used several times for spiritual retreats. Some of the most profound experiences in the lives of those attending took place there. Ron was always our host and guide. Patricia sang with him or alone for many meetings we had together. We were so blessed by their presence!

Cal Thomas moved to work with our NBC station and became a close friend. Together we formed a men's cell group that met every Friday morning at his house. His wife loved to cook breakfast for us. As Cal scoured the city as a newsman, he invited many he interviewed to attend as a guest. Many dignitaries in the government and industry were witnessed to in that breakfast.

The Seven Last Words of the Church was released January 1, 1973 and describes this period in detail. I was learning so many things I would not have discovered if that precious congregation had not allowed me the freedom to pioneer.

During this time, I completed my Doctor of Ministries degree by correspondence from Luther Rice Baptist seminary. My thesis was published June 1, 1974, under the title *This Gift Is Mine*.



I was approached by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist convention to share my strategies with missionaries in Japan and Hong Kong. My companion for that one-month tour was Dr. O. W. House and his wife. We had equal time each day to speak in the mission meetings.

He detailed for them his "Program Based Design" and I would share my radical "Cell Church" model! Strangely, neither one of us paid much attention to what the other was teaching. We had lovely fellowship on the trip. As I look back on that event, I realize I was being evaluated by the Mission Board for an invitation to plant my strategy overseas.

When Ruth and I were approached about moving to Singapore to develop the strategy there, we both responded positively. We saw this as the fulfillment of our calls as young people to serve as missionaries.

Randall was young enough to go with us. I struggled with leaving my middle son behind.

I asked Dr. Hart, a child psychiatrist, if I should leave him to adjust to the next phase of his life as a student at Texas University in Austin? She advised me that whether I stayed or went would probably make little difference in his life, that he was mature enough to continue without us. She further promised to help him if he needed any assistance while we were away.

When we shared with the church our decision, they told us we should not consider this as another resignation, but an opportunity for them to sponsor us to the mission field. We had a precious send-off.

An amazing thing took place at that time. I had just preached my last sermon. We had erected a gymnasium that could be converted into a large auditorium or a basketball court in a matter of minutes by stacking the chairs in closets. They had just been stacked away, the people had departed, and the entry doors were still open.

I was standing alone in the gymnasium, musing about our next steps. A stranger entered through the door and walked to me. He told me that God would take care of us as we entered our new ministry. I thanked him and we both turned around to walk in opposite directions.

A moment later, I decided to get his name. When I turned around to ask him, he had disappeared! He certainly did not have time to walk to the door at the far end of the room! As I pondered it, I realized I must have seen an angel. Was it my guardian?



As we entered orientation in Georgia, I was surprised to discover my friend Bill Beckham had also arrived with his children to attend the same four-month event. We were being sent to

neighboring countries: I would be in Singapore; he would be in Thailand. Our families spent much time together.

Just as we were finishing our training Keith Parks, our Area Director, spoke to me. He explained that securing a visa for me was being held up. He was not sure when it would be granted and suggested we return to Houston or anywhere we wanted to stay and remain on salary and go fishing until things got worked out.

I did not know at that time that the missionaries in Singapore were dead set against my coming. They were very traditional and had fewer converts than any other mission in Southeast Asia.

I offered to be temporarily assigned to another country. Keith poked his finger into my chest and said he had expected me to say that! He offered me the pulpit of the English language International Church in Saigon, Vietnam.



We traveled first to Thailand to stay with Bill and Mary Beckham while the necessary paperwork was completed for our entry into Saigon. We arrived just as the fighting in the north was becoming severe.

We were given a small apartment in a missionary compound near the Tan San Nut airport. Across the lawn in another apartment was a Christian and Missionary Alliance couple. A huge iron gate sheltered us from the military activity around us. Machine gun nests were at every corner. Curfew was at 8 o'clock and anyone on the street after that could be shot on sight.

My son Randall was enrolled in a school for American military children. He began to gather spent bullets that landed into the grass during the nights, stacking them by size on his dresser. A helper was assigned to us named Chi Nam. She has a five-year-old boy named Phuc.

We dearly loved those Baptist missionaries! They had gone through years of war, planting churches, and even forming a seminary. I met Earl Bengs, stationed up country where a Baptist orphanage had been established in Dalat.

All the men in Saigon went North together to assist in an amazing move of the Holy Spirit in a coast city. Over 1000 people had been converted. They went to assist in baptizing them in the sea. We knew the end was coming soon and it was recognized to be a special harvest moment.

I had many Vietnamese military officers who had been converted in San Antonio, Texas, sent there for advanced training. I helped them organize cell groups in their houses. I noted that their doors and windows were always opened, so when the cell group began to sing, large crowds gathered on the sidewalk in front and listened.

When the invasion from the north began, only days were left before Saigon would be overrun. Pastors begin dismantling the seminary library and hiding the books under the beds of church members.

I was asked to spend a full day with all the Saigon Pastors, explaining to them how their members could go underground and how to train leaders for cell groups. They listened intently for six hours.

The missionary who served as president of the seminary was my translator. When I finished, I asked each Pastor to respond to me about what they had learned. The men began to chatter among themselves. I could sense they were upset but did not know why. When I asked for interpretation, the missionary waved his hand at me to remain silent.

After about 10 minutes, they began to intensely pray. After they departed, I learned what they were saying. They complained bitterly that all their seminary training had been focused about what to do in the pulpit. The information I presented should have been given to them months ago. They were sharing how critical it would be to prepare their congregations before the end.



The Alliance missionary had been in country for 10 years. He had discovered a Catholic priest who had taken off his vestments, donned a farmer's gown, and moved into a slum to minister to the poor. I was taken to visit him.

We wore rubber boots to wade through the muddy urine-soaked paths until we reached a small bungalow deep inside the shanty town. Seated on the porch were people being fed by Father Vey.

He began to share his life story with me in English. He had been educated in Paris during the French occupation of his country. He opened the glass door of an old bookcase and handed me a small book. He had translated the Psalms into Vietnamese, paying careful attention to the five tones of the language so they could be sung aloud. He asked me to take the book with me and preserve it.

I later took Ruth back with me to stand in the back of the little chapel he had inside the bungalow to attend his evening vesper service. With candles burning, he held a mass singing the psalms. It was deeply moving. He came twice on Sunday evenings on his bicycle to hear me speak.

Father Vey was beheaded when Saigon was invaded by the North Vietnamese. I carried his book back to the United States and placed it in the library of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.



After only a few months in Saigon, orders were given for us to evacuate. At that moment a cable came from Singapore, informing us visas had been secured. In February 1975 we boarded a Vietnam Airlines flight. The pilot, a military officer, was handcuffed to the steering wheel to be sure he did not flee when we landed at the airport.

One of the veteran missionaries was dispatched to pick us up. With the sound of incoming rockets still ringing in our ears, Singapore was a garden of beauty!

As Randall, Ruth and I were driven out of the airport the veteran missionary commented, "Neighbour, you didn't come like the rest of us. Don't expect to be treated like the rest of us!" That hostility led to silence between us until we reached our destination. Young Randall did not grasp what that meant, and we did not explain it to him.

We were assigned a bungalow and finally received the shipment from the United States of things we had packed in Houston. We were barely settled when one evening we had a knock at the door.

A young policeman who did not want to be identified handed me a note and quickly left.

It had been written by Mr. Hai, the head of the Baptist orphanage in Dalat, Vietnam!

It said, "Mr. Neighbour, we are on Saint John's Island and desperately need help!"

I immediately contacted the mission office. I did not know that this island was a possession of Singapore, about a mile offshore. It had become their penal colony for drug addicts.

93 orphans had escaped from Vietnam in a small boat. The engine quit and drifted helplessly until a Chinese freighter threw it a rope. As it was dragged it filled with water and the children frantically bailed it. As Singapore was approached, the freighter dropped it by the island. A Singapore police boat rescued the children and hid them in barracks.

At the time, Singapore's government wanted nothing to do with the war and wanted nothing at all to do with refugees! When we approached the government, their first response was to give the Baptist mission opportunity to assist the children.

A \$5000 benevolence check was provided. then demanded quickly to be returned. There would be no record of their knowledge that the children ever existed,

Private launches ferried three women missionaries back-and-forth to purchase shoes and clothes and food for the children, some of them only three years old.

The U. S. Embassy contacted the Center for Refugees in Switzerland. The Mission was informed we would have to find an organization in America to receive the children.

I made a telephone call to Cal Thomas in the middle of the night in Houston and explained the situation. The church voted unanimously to receive the children. Paul and Betty Lou Martin had dedicated their farm to become Touch Ranch, the church's retreat center. They offered it to house them.

The congregation immediately began to prepare to receive them. A Swissair flight brought them to their new facilities in Texas. We watched CNN in Singapore show us how they were being cared for by Dr. Dan Redmond and the members of the congregation.

The Buckner Baptist Children's Home then received them. Two of the families in the church including the Martins and Dr. Redmond kept two of them.



I established The Singapore Centre for Urban Studies. A volunteer woman from Arizona came to assist me. We prepared a 12-foot map of the island on the office wall and began to assemble census reports, locations of all churches and religious temples. I prepared a strategy for reaching the island nation.

I cultivated the Chinese Pastors, encouraging them to begin cell groups in the high-rise apartment buildings that housed everyone in the island.

The Pastors were excited, but the missionaries were not. My strategy did not look anything like what they had developed using the Southern Baptist Program Base Design!

I was invited by the missions in Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia to consult with them about developing home cell groups. I coached Bill Beckham's Thailand urban team to develop a strategy for Bangkok.



I had made a promise to the Lord that every single day we lived overseas I would start the day by praying for my two sons in the States. I particularly focused on my Rodney. I know he was struggling with his faith, and I often had to fight back tears as I thought of how lonely he probably was in Austin.

One morning I woke with a dread in my heart. The Lord was telling me something was wrong with him. I could not shake the feeling. I made a telephone call to a good friend pastoring in Austin and asked him without delay to visit Rodney's apartment. When Rodney opened the door, his skin was yellow and he had a high fever, almost delirious with Hepatitis.

When the word came to me, I notified Ray Graham, Paul Martin, and Dr. Hart to provide assistance. A hospital flight was arranged by Paul Martin to bring him to Houston. Dr. Dan Redmond stayed by his bed until he began to recover. I was told later that if he had gone much longer without aid, he would have died.

Dr. Juanita Robertson took him to her home while he convalesced. We sent him a plane ticket and he flew to be with us in Singapore. I gave him Mere Christianity to read. The Lord touched his heart through it. He sat Ruth and me down and turned all the cards upside as he shared his secret journey with us. I can remember as though it happened yesterday how the three of us hugged each other and wept together.

I called Bill Beckham and asked if Rodney could visit with his family in Thailand. He stayed in their home for a couple of weeks before returning to the United States.



As we approached our second year, the chairman of the mission who lived across the street walked over and demanded the keys to the mission car we drove. It was explained that it was needed. Period. It was driven across the street to be parked in his front yard for weeks.

Meanwhile, we had to walk several blocks to the market or secure transportation to get around. I finally went over and asked him when he might return it. I was told that the missionaries had finally decided I had learned my "lesson;" I could have the keys back!

As we approached the end of our third year, the strategy was being implemented by nearly every church. Reported baptisms had jumped significantly and the Pastors were pleased with the training they had received.

I went to work in the Philippines for a month. When I returned, I found my precious Ruthie deeply hurt in my absence by the missionaries. We were told that unlike all the other missionaries who took their furlough time and left their furniture intact, we would be required to

pack it all up and put it into storage. I assumed it was because they thought we would not come back. They certainly did not want us back!

When the Area Representative visited, I tendered my resignation. In trying to persuade me to stay, he commented that I should not sit on the stove if I could not take the heat. There immediately flashed into my mind the evaluation from Nashville that pointed to my inability to deal with conflict. It had struck again!

Fortunately, my resignation was exactly at the time that my successor in the Houston congregation resigned. When the church learned I was returning, I immediately received a call to take the pulpit for the third time! That ministry began in 1977.



As my ministry began again, some of the charter members began to tell me that something had changed in me, that I was not the same person they had known earlier. This confused me until I realized I had seen a world beyond the boundaries of the USA. This led me to see a need for a consultant ministry.

I flew to West Palm Beach to discuss this with my closest friend, Dean Rhoads. We stayed on his yacht, anchored in the channel beside Richard Nixon's summer home. TOUCH MINISTRIES was born. His attorney Arnie Weisler drew up the nonprofit incorporation papers.

It was a nonprofit ministry to equip churches. It would touch every major continent on the face of the earth. We were empowered to publish materials and conduct seminars, all focused on the creation of home cell groups as the backbone for New Testament church life.

In 1978, Dan Boone chose to follow Christ. He owned a car dealership and had a dynamic personality. We became close friends. He had little Christian background.

To disciple him. I prepared a daily growth guide, meeting him every Monday for an hour or so. As we completed it, he suggested I should publish the materials. I sent the manuscript to my friend Roy Edgemon.

He asked me to come to Nashville to discuss the project. We settled on the name Survival Kit for New Christians. Practical learning exercises were added by William McElrath. Cartoon sketches illustrated the content. First published in 1979, for over 40 years it has been equipping new believers, selling over 2 million copies in English, and translated into 42 languages. It has sold more copies than any book published by the Broadman Press.



Two significant conferences took place in the gymnasium of The People Who Care. Dr. Francis Schaeffer led us for a week to fully digest the theology of the church as expressed in the New Testament. As he taught us speaking in his Swiss legging pants and gray beard, we were carried away by his powerful expositions of the Scriptures.

The second conference drew people from across the United States. It was called "Future Church" and featured eleven speakers including Ray Stedman, Os Guinness, Larry Richards, Jack Taylor, Roy Edgemon, etc. These messages were compiled by me and released as a book *Future Church* in 1980.



By 1979, the church staff had swelled along with the membership. As many as 20 converts a week were reported. Milton Womack served as a volunteer to counsel cell members with emotional disorders. Ron Trammel came to work with training events. Then came Jimmy and Janet Dorrell, to build our ministry to teen-agers.

A brilliant intellectual, coupled with a passion for the lost, Jim became a perfect companion. He took full advantage of Touch Ranch to provide retreats, so we bought minibuses for him to use.

He challenged juniors and seniors to create cell groups that met in homes on Sunday evenings.

Under his dynamic leadership, dozens of these groups developed. He began to name each group by a letter of the Greek alphabet. When the alphabet was filled, he began to add groups named by the Hebrew alphabet.

We added Mike Fritscher to the staff to serve under him developing cell groups among the junior high school students. These blossomed as well. All this time we were learning more and more about how to release believers to become ministers.

Jimmy became a powerful influence in the community, even being interviewed on television. For two straight years, graduating high school senior classes voted for him to be their Baccalaureate speaker.

After four years, Jimmy and Janet moved to Waco to spend the rest of their lives developing an amazing ministry serving the poor of the city. They formed Mission Waco, The Church Under the Bridge, and ministered in India, Mexico, and other nations.



As we grew the adult cells, the Lord impressed me to bring a series of messages explaining that every cell group was a body of Christ. Each one should expect to be directed to target a specific area of the community.

This made the traditional cells aware that God would give them a burden for specific groups that they should evangelize. I stressed that, unlike the traditional church, our staff did not exist to assign what these target areas were.

They should not look to us for direction, but to the Holy Spirit. He would direct them. The staff would then be backups to help them implement whatever God told them to do.

I believed this was something missing in the traditional church. There, the staff presented plans and the people did what they were told. I wanted to change that!

Ann Graves was the first person to catch this vision. She came to my office and explained she had observed many Japanese families in her neighborhood. She learned the husbands were almost always traveling. The wives were trapped alone in their houses with no understanding of our culture or language.

She had prepared a strategy. She would form groups that would teach English as a second language to create a link to these women. She explained we could call this our HOPE ministry: Helping Others Practice English. She had already located course materials. She would put posters in the grocery stores that carried Japanese foods.

This was exactly what I was waiting for! I explained to her that the next step would be for the Holy Spirit to call fourth companions who would feel led to join her in forming groups specializing in the HOPE ministry. I asked her to present this ministry to the entire congregation on the next Sunday morning.

I preceded her by explaining that since every cell group was a body of Christ, it would become a sending body. Our existing cells would release members called to join a new group, formed as the Holy Spirit revealed new target areas.

I indicated that this would begin to develop a whole new level of cell groups. They would be called Target Groups.

Ann spoke passionately about the vision God had given her. When she finished, I asked all the cells to pray that members would sense God's call to join her. All the cell groups that week processed this information.

The following Sunday I continued to focus on the theme, "Lord, send me!" The cells were instructed to lay hands on any member who felt led to be sent out from them to join the new Hope cell.

Before I preached on the third Sunday, Ann stood before the congregation inviting women called to form HOPE. It was a dramatic moment! As we waited silently, one by one, 15 women rose from their seats and joined her. They held hands in a circle. I asked the deacons to gather around them and each one pray for their ministry. From the start of the target groups, I wanted it to be centered upon the work of God and not the work of the church staff.

Target cells begin to proliferate! People with special skills or hobbies realized they could touch others like themselves who needed Christ. My book *Target Group Evangelism*, written with Cal Thomas, tells more of the story.

As more and more Target Cells were added, we came up with a novel idea. Once a quarter we would turn a Sunday into a Touch Fair.

We created streets on the floor of the gymnasium using rolls of brown paper. Booths for each target cell category were placed in rows. Groups decorated their booth and prepared to explain their ministry to new members, inviting them to join.

Pizza was served and a wading pool with magnetized fish was set up for the children to catch them for prizes. This became a tradition that everyone looked forward to!



Dr. Roy Edgemon had become Director of Church Training for the Southern Baptist convention. He suggested it might be time for me to insert home cell groups into denominational life.

A contract was drawn up with the Sunday School Board to be called “Project 80” – indicating that during the year 1980 we would select 80 churches across the nation and use them to test the insertion of home groups into their structures.

I would remain Pastor of the church. Funds were provided to add an associate Pastor to care for the congregation while I traveled.

Roy had cautioned me at the start that the Sunday School Department would not be pleased that he was setting this project up in his Training Union department. They would see it as threatening the sale of Sunday School quarterlies. I had no idea that the income from their sale comprised the major percentage of funds running the whole denomination!

We chose a man to assist me. We opened an office for the project separate from the church. A grant from a Carpool listener funded a small television studio. We added a videographer and a secretary to the team.

As I trained the test churches and collected weekly reports to be evaluated, I ran into a problem with my new Associate Pastor. I would call the church office for him, and he would be “away for a few days.” I slowly recognized he was not truly committed to the position but was coasting along. This troubled me greatly - but I was locked in.

After an arduous year of production of video training tapes, traveling two weeks out of every month, the year ended. 4,160 weekly reports showed mixed results. The greater percentage of churches had demonstrated they were happy with the progress.

Perhaps 25% revealed hesitation to continue. One of the stated reasons was a mistrust of church members not being properly supervised by staff! Since the groups took place in the home and not the church building, they could not be properly controlled!

However, I was pleased with the results. As the year ended, I was in Columbia, South Carolina speaking in the basement of the first Baptist Church to the Association’s Pastors.

I was summoned to the nearby kitchen to take a long-distance call from Roy Edgemon. He was in the Atlanta airport. He informed me that the Sunday School Department Director had just called a meeting of Convention board members. He had been told in no uncertain terms that I was to be fired and the project terminated at once!

Tradition had won. The financial cost was too great. Sunday School Quarterlies had won out.

The renewal of the church was too dangerous. I was persona non grata within the Southern Baptist convention. I had been booked to be a featured speaker at the annual Pastor’s conference in Pine Mountain. When I arrived, it had been moved to a small classroom holding 50 people.

This ended my long dream of contributing to the denomination. I had served it in so many positions for most of my ministry. It ended so suddenly with that telephone call!

It took a few weeks for me to fully absorb what this meant. I realized I had just been removed from a “culture bubble” that had blinded me to a Christian community infinitely greater than this one small segment.

It was at this time I stopped traveling and returned to pastoring the congregation full time. The person salaried by the Sunday School Board to be my assistant was no longer needed.

I prepared a check for six months of salary and called him to have lunch with me. I explained why he was being released and that I wanted to bless him with a significant sum to tide him over as he found his next ministry.

With a smirk, he slid the check back across the table and said, “You can’t fire me! You just think you can!”

I called a Deacon’s meeting. Unknown to me, he had manipulated them for a year, subtly making them think he was not my assistant but was a Co-Pastor in every way. He wanted me gone, to have the church all to himself.

I called a meeting of my deacons and explained the situation. The chairman cleared his throat and said, “I think you ought to learn how to work with him.” While it was never taken to a vote. I mistakenly assumed every Deacon agreed. In later years I have discovered that was not true.

I then explained to them that having the two of us as equal leaders of the church were like having two heads on one body. They left me no alternative except to submit my resignation, which I did.

As a result of that conflict, in early 1982 I resigned for the third time.

As I write this at age 92, I reflect on what that Nashville personality evaluation told me about myself in 1969. In the face of conflict, again I quit. In my mind, I rationalized this as God’s way of thrusting me into an international ministry for the rest of my life. Perhaps it was exactly that.

PART 5: GLOBAL MINISTRY 1982 – 1995

(Includes Singapore 2)

I threw myself into developing Pastor’s Conferences to explain how to transition into cell-based lifestyles for their congregations. The next years were spent in the United States and Canada training scores of Pastors at a time.

I also began to consult for large churches, determined not to set a fee as most church consultants did. I have always had a strong conviction:

It is the task of a servant to obey his Master.

It is the desire of the master to provide whatever the servant needs.

Therefore, the servant must never have a second source of supply.

I have never refused my ministry because I could not be reimbursed for it. I have flown halfway around the world and back at my own expense to provide ministry without compensation. Jehovah Jireh has always made it possible for our needs to be provided.

One large church in Oklahoma City saw significant growth and attracted many from around the state. Another Pastor in Tulsa began to have seminars for the area we directed for him.

Another movement began in Toronto with the Airport Church. This expanded into weeks of conferences in many parts of Canada.

I began to see other cell church movements develop, including Larry Krieder’s Dove Fellowship in Pennsylvania and Gerald Martin’s Cornerstone community. We had sweet fellowship.



In 1984, Korea had a celebration marking 100 years since Christian missionaries entered that nation. I was one of seven men invited from the United States to present messages during the week of Celebrations.

I had been on the board of Yonggi Cho's Church Growth International for many years. I think that is why my name was included with such dignitaries as Carl F.H. Henry and astronaut John Glenn. I took my son Ralph with me. Billy Graham was the featured speaker for the final meeting. We sat in awe on the platform as a half million people sat on the ground in a pouring rain at Yeouido Plaza while he preached.

Later, I took a group of Pastors from the United States to visit the Yeouido cell church and Prayer Mountain. A staff member of a large Baptist Church in Houston was in that group.

Upon returning home, I was invited to serve on the staff of that church to create cell groups. I was required to end all outside ministries and focus only on that project.

At that time, I felt that I needed the counterpart of the Korean church in the United States to be a base for our ministry. I reluctantly agreed to fulfill this requirement. My wife Ruth guided TOUCH ministries at that time.

I developed a complete cell system for the church, including Zone Supervisors and Zone Pastors. To my surprise, two of them were quietly moved into Sunday School positions and withdrew from their activity under my guidance.

I was never consulted in advance. I was told the Senior Pastor considered those Sunday School tasks were higher priority than the cells!

I realized I was putting new wine in old skins and the leadership was not fully committed to a total transfer into a pure cell driven model. I began to sorely regret giving up all I had for a pastor who wanted what he wanted, no matter what.

About a year after working in the church, I secured budget money to publish a booklet to explain cell groups. It was to be distributed to every church member. I submitted the text for approval to the Senior Pastor, who obviously approved it without reading it.

Artwork had been prepared. Beautifully printed, 8000 copies were delivered to the church. At home, I received a telephone call from my secretary telling me the Pastor had ordered the entire shipment to be discarded into the dumpster!

Amazed, I drove quickly to the church to discuss this with him. He was too busy to see me. Finally, sitting in my office with just a wall separating us, I received a telephone call from him. He said, "Ralph, we just can't release this to our members. It will confuse them. You are telling them they are all ministers. WE are the ministers! That is why I stopped this."

Once again, I faced a serious conflict. My life was driven by a vision I did not own; it owned me! I felt totally betrayed. I had given up my TOUCH ministry and turned it over to another to operate, to convert this church a pure cell church. That had been solidly understood.

As before, I saw no way out except instantly resigning, which I did.

It was agreed that because I had become so popular with hundreds of the members who were in the cells, it would be best if I remained long enough to wind down what I had started. I painfully dismantled the entire structure.

Eighteen months from the start, I returned to direct TOUCH.



Soon after this, I received a call from Kiev, Ukraine. Pat Robertson had contracted with the Russian government to broadcast through government loudspeakers placed in every home to receive official messages. For two hours for many days, he presented the message of Christ.

He invited people to send in pictures of themselves if they chose to follow Jesus. Over two million letters with photos were received!

His team in Kiev wanted my help. How could they organize home groups with these converts? I flew over.

I prepared a little booklet that could be printed cheaply and mailed to the list. It described how to start a group and instructions about how to maintain it for six weeks. The subjects were primarily a revision of *The Survival Kit for New Christians*.

The first distribution went to 20,000. Positive responses poured in. Thousands of cells were formed. All requested more materials.

As a result, I was invited to appear on the 700 Club telecast. An appeal was made for funds from the audience to publish all my equipping materials for distribution in Russia. Over one million dollars was received, used to publish and distribute my materials free to Russian-speaking Christians. My book was also translated and published by them.



I want to insert here a few illustrations of healings I have experienced:

Betty Lottman came to the West Memorial Baptist Church. She had given birth to Tracy, a precious little girl with a retarded mind. The stress of this put Betty in the hospital in deep despair. As I prayed with her, our heavenly father healed her broken heart. I baptized her and saw her glow with joy as she brought her little daughter to the services. She and her husband Bill started a cell group for parents who had similar children. This grew into a little worship service in our children's building for them on Sunday mornings while the adults met together.

Then Betty came to me, sharing she was becoming blind from cataracts. She explained the Lord had spoken to her that he would heal them. She was asking for prayer.

Following scriptural instructions, I gathered the deacons and we laid hands on her. When we finished, she announced she was healed! It was so sudden, I wanted to be sure. I did not want to announce something to the church that might be premature. A week later, she asked if she could give her testimony. I suggested we wait a little longer. Finally, after a full month, she gave her testimony to the body on a Sunday morning. We rejoiced together.

I was hesitant because I did not want to make the mistake of attributing to God something he had not really done. I think this revealed my own need to grow more in expecting God to do the unexpected.



In our TOUCH family was a lovely couple, Mary and Bob Sigler. Their granddaughter Melanie was born with a serious eye defect. As time went by, she had to wear thick glasses.

When she became a teenager, she lost her sight completely. I found Ruth late one night sitting in the dark in her chair, praying about Melanie. She told me she felt that if we prayed for Melanie she would be healed.

I sensed Ruth had been given a word from the Lord. We made an appointment with her parents, John and Kathy Smith, to pray together for her healing. They had just moved into a new home in Austin.

One evening, we all gathered around our telephones. John prayed first, asking the Lord to help him with his unbelief, begging for her healing. Each one of us followed. Then precious Melanie prayed, telling God she would love him whether she received healing or not.

Melanie was in the bedroom with her parents as they prayed. After we hung up, she said, "Mother! You have a wreath of flowers above your bed!" They were thunderstruck. They discovered that her sight had returned, at least partially.

The next morning, we received a telephone call reporting this. Then Melanie got on the phone.

She explained she was looking out the window across the street at the house across the street. She had double vision of the house. She prayed, asking the Lord to make it one house. As she did so, it happened! We all praised the Lord.

While Mary was a devoted Christian, Bob was an atheist. I had fished many days with him through many years. On one occasion, I indicated that Mary would probably ask me to preach his funeral sermon. I shared I did not know exactly what I would be able to say about a man who had not followed Christ.

Laughing, he spit tobacco into his coffee can and informed me I should take advantage of the occasion to tell everyone he was frying in hell forever - and if they did not repent, they would also. It broke my heart.

Knowing that Bob had already been given the news, I called him. When I asked him what he thought about what had happened to his granddaughter, he choked up and said, "Ralph, no power on earth could do this!"

He gave his life to Christ, and I baptized him. I did preach his funeral sermon and rejoiced to announce he was in heaven forever.



My granddaughter Ruth was born January 17, 1985, to my oldest son Ralph and his wife Pam. We were delighted that Nathan would have a little sister. Our joy turned to sorrow when the doctors discovered she had a hole in her heart. Memories went back to Philadelphia's Hahnemann hospital where I had experienced a little girl die from this.

I decided to go to prayer for her. After a time, I switched on my television set to TBN. A male soloist was about to sing. The song was, "He can heal a broken heart." I wept as I thanked the Lord for this message. I called Ralph and shared my conviction that whether by surgery or God's touch, our Ruthie would be fine. Soon after that, she was examined by the doctors. They reported her heart had healed itself.



In 1986 I became concerned about the cell church movement not exposing every believer to the full content of scripture. In seminary, we took a Bible survey course that swept us through every book of the Bible. I decided to prepare a book survey focusing on a cell-based ecclesiology.

The course provided one year of daily videos, each five minutes long. Five weekdays for 52 weeks required a total of 260 segments.

The project required videographers and editing equipment. The Lord provided a grant from a *Carpool* listener, sufficient to fund the project.

From the Houston School of Art and Design, I secured students needing credits for their classes. I wrote scripts for several weeks and scoured the Internet for biblical pictures to illustrate Bible stories.

We produced four CD's that contained the entire series. Using interactive software, the students built in stops so the viewer could study the screen and scripture passages. We added games for the children in the family to learn Bible stories.

The *Cover the Bible* CD series was marketed to several thousand people. Unfortunately, our presentation choice could not stand the test of time. CDs lasted only a few years before they were obsolete.

I decided to put it on the Internet. A website was developed by Eric Wargo.

Each five-minute segment could be selected. A checkmark was added after each was watched.

In 2017, I videotaped the five-minute scripts again. I added pages as I spoke from the 488 page *Cover the Bible* book.

As I write this, the series is a free download at www.coverthebible.com. It is also available in the Russian language on the website www.cb.online.

A free *Cover the Bible* 488-page textbook is downloadable online.



I was invited to join the faculty of Columbia Bible College and Seminary in 1985. As Professor of Church Planting, I planted a congregation with the students. We began in my living room near the center of the city. After a light Sunday breakfast, the students went by twos to knock on the doors of people during church time.

Those who opened the doors were simply asked, "What need in your home might we pray for?" My students discovered a population of unreached people who quickly responded to a loving hand reaching out.

Through the months, we grew and occupied a Seventh Day Adventist church. Many students discovered the pure structure of a cell church. Some took this overseas as missionaries to France, Russia, Japan, and southeast Asia. Jim and Barbara Lassiter had been missionaries during our stay in Vietnam. They became part of our church plant.

In the summer of 1988, I took 16 students on an around-the-world class titled “Developing Strategies for World-Class Cities.” We stopped first in Amsterdam, then went on to India where we visited Mother Teresa in Calcutta. After Singapore we spent a full month in Brisbane, Australia.

Brian and Lorna Jenkins hosted us as we dissected the city block by block. Portable Macintosh computers traveled with us to record data. We finally printed a 301page report, presenting it to a community of Pastors from several denominations. It outlined every segment of the city and made recommendations for evangelistic strategies appropriate to the population,

The following year we repeated this in Auckland, New Zealand. Brian and Lorna Jenkins had moved there and once again assisted me in the project of the survey. We printed a 488 Page book that year using the same format. That year I had 21 students travel with me. My companion was Ted Stump, a brilliant student. He later developed a ministry helping churches reach teenagers through cell groups.



Bill and Mary Beckham visited me in Houston the weekend of Labor Day, 1991. They were in the process of restructuring their ministry after resigning from serving in Thailand. We had always been close, even when years and distance separated us.

On their way back to Dallas on the freeway, the Lord spoke to Bill: “Attach yourself to Ralph.” When he called to tell me this, I was flabbergasted! I had never thought of having such an intimate relationship with anyone but my wife.

The Lord confirmed quickly to me that this was in his plan. I had at least one year of requests for me to schedule trending events I could not take. As we discussed, we decided it would be best for us to set up a small nonprofit corporation so his expenses and honorariums would remain separate from TOUCH.

God begin to use him globally. We published his first book, The Second Reformation. We would later travel to New Zealand, Alaska, Mexico, and frequently to Brazil. He has become closer to me than any blood relative.

We are constantly stealing concepts from each other, batting things around. He has an analytical mind that makes him live with a pad to make notes. When we get to heaven, I know we will still be connected.



Lawrence Khong flew from Singapore to talk to me while I was teaching at Columbia Seminary. I met him during my stay in Singapore the first time.

He had come to study at Dallas Theological Seminary soon after he was married. I brought the couple to work on my staff in Houston during his summer break. He had become quite dogmatic because of that seminary, rejecting any charismatic views related to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

It strained the relationship between us. I had experienced too much of the power of God to be a Cessationist (e.g., spiritual gifts have ceased).

Much to his distress, in a moment of deep prayer he was given the gift of the prayer language. It scared him to death, but he began to be open to the work of the Spirit.

This cut him off from the evangelical community in Singapore. He had formed a new church, the Faith Community Baptist Church.

He sought my assistance. I made several trips to Singapore during the next months. I met with him and his staff, helping them structure the church to be totally structured around cell groups. They were perfect for the huge residential towers covering the island state.

In 1991, Ruth and I returned to serve him as Associate Pastor. Christina Chua became my secretary. We worked day and night for five years at a pace impossible anywhere in the world except Singapore! I found it to be the original city that never sleeps.

I established the Touch Equipping Station System, an internal training school. It began at a person's conversion and included a full year of seminary level courses, all designed to be very practical. It included on-the-job training. We graduated many Pastors who became staff members.

I flew in mentors from the United States and England, exposing the students to anointed men. Among them was Dr. Roger Forster from London, who taught the history of the cell church through the centuries. Jack Deer, former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, came to share how God had moved in his life to rip him away from his Cessasionist position.

Lawrence was a leader who was totally teachable and deeply committed to cells, prayer and evangelism. We began with 600 members.

As we grew, we added staff and space. The city was divided into four districts with a Pastor in charge of each area.

I brought Lorna Jenkins to come from New Zealand and build the cell ministry to children. She and her husband had both graduated from Columbia seminary when I was there teaching.

A theater was reconstructed for the auditorium. It had a balcony, eventually filled seven times a weekend. In five years, we grew from 600 to 7500.

While Peter Wagner was speaking to the TESS students, we were notified his wife was in serious trouble with a blood clot traveling from her leg to her brain. We quickly rushed Peter to the hospital treating her. When we arrived, a nurse heard his name and interrupted us.

She explained that a woman was holding on the telephone from the United States. It was one of his faithful prayer intercessors. An ocean away, she had been made aware by the Holy Spirit that his wife's life was in jeopardy!

The power of the Spirit was evident to all. We had occasions when God fell so powerfully on the congregation the service could not be ended. This created a traffic jam because we had back-to-back Sunday services with 30 minutes to change over the audience. Thousands waited outside to enter the East doors while the previous conversation exited the West doors.

On one occasion, an unbelieving husband seated in the balcony observed people falling to the floor, touched by the Spirit. He muttered to his wife, "I'm getting out of here!" As he stepped into the aisle, he felt himself pushed to his knees. Encounters with the power of God brought many conversions, including his.

On one occasion, children who had been dismissed to wait for their parents somehow were able to enter the auditorium and went up and down the aisles laying hands on adults and praying for them.

Conversions were so rapid that we used wooden blocks with numbers on them behind the receptionist's desk in the church office. Through the weekdays, members would phone in the contact information of someone they had just led to Christ. The wooden block with a number on it would be increased by one to show the latest figure of total annual conversions.

Mission teams were trained in TESS. The church secured a house on the water in Indonesia, a 45-minute speed boat ride away. It was a remote spot in a godless countryside. A missionary team had to remain there for a full six weeks without returning to Singapore. The purpose was to see if they could survive between themselves without conflict. If they passed, they were sent to East Russia, Kazakhstan, China, even Mongolia.

I was part of a team that traveled to survey Mongolia before sending a team. When we arrived, we discovered that control of the country by the Russians had ended without anyone being trained to maintain the pipes that heated the entire city from one central plant. The temperature was 35° below zero in every part except the US Embassy. I shall never forget that trip!

We held international conferences not only in Singapore but also in Taiwan. Pastors from all over the world came. Many remained for several weeks to immerse themselves in our structure. This included teams from Australia, New Zealand, Germany, and South Africa.

I turned 70 in one of the Taiwan conferences. I was seated on the front row of a packed auditorium during a service. My heart was flooded with joy that the vision given me so long before, was beginning to influence many nations.

The presence of the Lord moved me to worship him. I dropped to my knees to pray, but soon stretched prostrate on the floor.

In my spirit I began to talk to the Lord: "Father, how many years do I have left to serve you?" I did not hear an audible voice what in my heart I heard him say, "I will give you until you are 85. Use the years wisely!"

That awareness remained in my thoughts as the years went by. Now 92, I believe He honored me using the years wisely and extended my strength to serve Him further.



Larry Stockstill, Pastor of Bethany church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana had attended one of our Singapore seminars. He returned to erect an additional building to his church to house Zone Pastors. He adapted our strategy and used my materials. He began to conduct cell seminars in his church. I often spoke for him.

He opened a school to train cell Pastors. In September of 1998, I drove to Baton Rouge to teach the students. At the close, I planned to drive to Mississippi to fish with my friend Bob Sigler. I fell asleep at the wheel near Hattiesburg, rolled over twice and broke my neck.

My son Rodney and Ruth came to the hospital and drove me home. I spent several weeks sleeping in a chair, thanking the Lord he had spared my life.

Later, Larry invited me to join him to survey two cell churches in Central America. We went first to Guatemala, then to Bogotá, Columbia. Cesar Castellanos had developed the International Charismatic Mission using a system he called "G 12." Both of us were profoundly impressed by it.

I was unaware at the time that it was going to turn out to be a very cultish movement. Larry was enthralled. He discarded the Singapore model to adapt the G 12 model. Through additional trips to Bogota and additional research, I concluded this did show the signs of a cult. A franchising system had been set up from the Bogotá headquarters.

At the Cell Church Missions Network in November 2002, I spoke about the dangers:

"The concept of building a multilevel marketing structure that peaks in the authority of a special Global Apostle with his hand-picked assistants has now come into existence. Bedazzled by the promise of fast-track growth for their congregations, Pastors are kneeling to kiss the gold rings worn by the Apostles. At the same time, they are severing relationships with fellow cell church workers who are not among the devotees. In many parts of the world, painful reports are coming about Pastors who one or two years ago were very intimately involved in helping each other and working together in the cell movements in their cities, but who now shun fellowship with others who did not bow before the Apostle's strategy."

By then, Larry had become one of 12 Apostles selected by Castellanos to wear a gold ring on his finger, assigning him one-twelfth of the earth to reign over G 12 churches.

Lawrence Khong in Singapore was also impressed by the G 12 and abandoned everything we had developed and wore another gold ring. Many Pastors jumped into the G-12 club.

I contacted Larry and shared with him my concerns about how the movement was fragmenting cell churches, cautioning it was close to becoming a cult. He angrily demanded that I appear before his Presbytery to be disciplined for false accusations. Of course, I refused.

As a result, a sad chasm developed between us. It would take more than a dozen years before he finally apologized to me. By then he had moved on to other interests.



The G 12 movement invaded Brazil. It began to destroy whole denominations. In Manaus, the G 12 Pastor even replaced the cross of Christ behind the pulpit with the breastplate of a high priest with 12 stones. Pastors in every denomination who joined the G 12 refused to continue to fellowship with the rest of their fellow Pastors.

Robert Lay called me to come to Manaus. Three theologically distinct denominations had joined hands to invite me: the Presbyterian Church of Brazil, the Assemblies of God, and the Pentecostal Church. I was asked to teach all their Pastors a Biblical basis for the cell movement.

Six thousand Pastors and delegates from these three nominations gathered as one body to hear me teach for a week about the contrast between a biblical theology of the cell church, contrasted with the G 12. A massive auditorium owned by the assemblies of God in Manaus was the site.

The first session began with the presidents of the three denominations locking arms and stating that they together were endorsing the rejection of the G 12 and had asked me to speak.

As Robert Lay translated for me, I sensed a special anointing to reveal the heart of God about his love for the bride of Christ. When I finished the week, I had been able to accomplish the objective of everyone understanding why the G 12 was not built on proper theological truths, while also commissioning those present to take the message of salvation to harvest men and women in their nation.

Several trips I made to Brazil after that were to assist churches that were being destroyed by using the G 12. It burned out church members in about 18 months, causing memberships to decrease drastically.



Later, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board sent me to work with the Baptist missionaries in Brazil. I spoke four times in four locations for several days. Many of the missionaries were impressed.

My heart sank when I discovered that within a couple of months, the same missionaries would be exposed to a second strategy that had been developed on the West Coast. It was typical of the confusion in the denomination that was in the process of dying, sort of a desperate attempt to throw out a variety of ideas that might make a difference.

Later, I went with my son Ralph to Brazil, this time invited by the actual Brazilian Pastors for their Annual Convention. Few missionaries attended this, but over 1000 Pastors did.

The format was a rubber stamp of the U.S. Southern Baptist annual convention. On the platform was a long desk with all the newly voted officials seated, as business was conducted in the afternoons. The morning sessions were mine.

I began by recounting for them the tragic decline of all statistics in the Convention to the north. I prophesied that because they were a rubber stamp, they could see their own future if they did not set aside the Program Base Design.

Following each morning presentation, they provided one hour for questions and answers. This was a very productive session. The newly elected vice president moderated these forums.

At the final session, the vice president turned to me and said, "I have one last question. It is my personal one to you. You have a view of the Holy Spirit that has challenged me. I have been hesitant all my ministry about how to relate to Him. What you would you say to me?"

My eyes filled with tears. I put down the microphone and walked over and embraced him saying, "Oh, my dear brother! Why are you afraid of your God? His Spirit will never harm you." After a long silence, men began to stand and pray aloud.

Brazilian Pastors in their second and third generation since creating cell groups have begun to write their own materials. One Pastor who went to Europe to plant has written a brilliant book to equip Portuguese speaking leaders. Several Brazilian cell churches have sponsored missionaries to plant in Asia and Africa. I believe that nation to be the center of the earth for dynamic cell churches.



In 1994, I went to South Africa from Singapore to train Pastors. All the equipping booklets were being published in Singapore and freighted to that country. We discovered that they could be published locally for half the cost.

The Singapore leaders refused to grant permission for my books to be printed there. Their only reason was a desire to make a profit from the sale of materials, something I despised. I had always stated that copyright of my materials meant the right to copy, since they were not mine but belonged to the Kingdom!

I brought the entire team from Singapore to do a major conference in Johannesburg. The disagreement about publishing my materials there came to a head. Sadly, I shared with Lawrence Khong that I could no longer support a movement that put profit before ministry.

As I reflect once more about that profile of my personality developed in Nashville in 1969, I realize I repeated again facing conflict by leaving, rather than by fighting.

After five years of serving in Singapore for the second time, I returned to my headquarters in Houston.

PART 6: GLOBAL MINISTRY 1995 – 2011

(South Africa, Brazil, Houston)

My return to Houston required me to take over the direction once again of TOUCH Outreach Ministries. Bill Beckham's son Joey had guided it during my absence and had done an excellent job of keeping the ministry moving forward. We had an amicable understanding that he would now step away so that I could continue to lead it.

My third son Randall had joined the team in 1992 while Joey was the Director. His wife Etna had sacrificially left a lucrative position with an oil pipeline company in May of 1995 to join the ministry.

I realized I needed to step away from the leadership with all its details. In early 1996 we had a meeting of the staff and I announced I was passing the torch to Randall. I do not know if anyone at that table, but I noticed this, but eyes rolled, and smiles were smothered. The team was very pleased that the old man had passed the baton.

South Africa occupied me almost constantly for the next several years. The first leader was a wonderful Pastor who was also a lawyer. The second person was a pilot and a Pastor I brought to the United States for orientation. When this connection was no longer viable, Harold Weitz, Pastor of the Little Falls Christian Centre, offered his services.

This amazing man had received the mantle of a prophet. A man of deep prayer, he was the perfect leader God had for the nation. We have ministered together in many parts of the world in the years that have followed.

Harold and his team had keen insights into the South African culture my American mind could not grasp. They adapted cell structures to exactly fit their culture. I learned much from Harold as I saw his careful revisions.

To fully train Pastors to transition, I had to take them through a series of coaching sessions. God had introduced me while in Singapore to a man from Michigan who passed through every few months on his way to equip Pastors in India.

I learned from him it was effective to give a Pastor a list of revision activities to complete in 90 days. They would cause a smooth transition of church life. It had worked successfully for him, and I knew it was what south Africa needed.

I returned from my first visit, having set up weekly conferences in three different areas of South Africa, to be held at three-month intervals. In four packed days I trained all the Pastors in each region how to implement three months of transition activities. They were to hold each other responsible in groups of three, consulting with each other and me when necessary.

For two solid months, I buried myself in my office in Houston crafting the first module and outlining the other three. Much prayer and research went into that document. It was published with plastic ring binders, so any pages needing to be revised for the second round could easily be replaced.

I flew back to teach Module One in the different areas. It was an exhausting pace that kept me on my feet for many hours each day. Then followed the 24-hour flights back to Houston, feverishly writing the next module.

That year is still a wonderful and precious blur in my mind. I observed a nation being turned upside down as the Holy Spirit reshaped the world views of Pastors and their churches.



As I was departing at the end of the first year, Dr. Isak Burger, president of the Apostolic Faith Mission, met me at the airport. He invited me to repeat The Year of Equipping for all his Pastors. The denomination had just merged the Indian, white, and black churches with a membership numbering 1.2 million members. I quickly agreed.

The AFM had been started in 1908 by John G. Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch, missionaries from the United States. Healing and deliverance took place everywhere the movement went.

As the years passed, leadership of the movement began to look over their shoulder and wanted to be more academic. A seminary was founded, and a Program Base Design was implemented.

I discovered that some of their churches sponsored as many as 39 different weekly activities, all inside a church building, to be performed by the memberships. Dr. Burger saw a dying denomination dropping 7% a year. It was his desire that we might turn this around.

I gladly offered my services and taught a second year, this time not having to write the material. Instead, I spent weeks at a time moving from district to district, repeating the same material for AFM Pastors. I took my son Randall with me on one of these trips and we had precious fellowship together. On another trip I took John Smith, whose daughter's eyesight had been restored.

As I came to the end of that year, Dr. Burger selected a young seminary graduate to join the staff to carry on the development of the cells. I brought him to the United States and was visibly unimpressed by his lack of passion for the work assigned to him.

When he arrived, he had already become infatuated with another church growth strategy from Germany. With a sinking feeling, I knew little would result from all my work. This has proved to be true. As with the Southern Baptists, a church structure strongly ingrained can hardly be disturbed by those who only want to coast. That denomination has continued to die.

I returned to South Africa many times after this to work with congregations that multiplied and planted fresh cell church congregations. One church planted by Little Falls among the Zulu tribe by Pastor Tabu in the slums of Johannesburg, grew to over 2000 members.

What a joy it was to preach to them. Instead of musical instruments, they used only their human voices. They had a joy that caused them to dance all over the room. I found more Spirit-filled churches in South Africa than in any other nation I have visited.



Gerald Martin had launched a cell movement that became multinational. In 1996, Robert Lay came to the United States to participate in one of his cell conferences in Harrisonburg, Virginia, held at Cornerstone church. There he met for the first time Dion Robert and Bill Beckham.

On that trip, Robert then came to Houston to see me. He sat on my couch to plan his ministry in Brazil. We had already talked about this idea when he visited in Singapore in 1994 at Faith community Baptist Church.

In 1996, Bill Beckham went to Brazil and had four conferences about the cell vision in different regions. This was a test to determine how much acceptance of the cell structure existed among the Pastors. It was totally successful. *Ministerio Igreja em Célula* was launched.

In September of 1967, I presented Module One of The Year of Equipping in Curitiba. Touch Outreach Ministries began to work closely with Robert. He secured rights to print all my equipping materials and books.

Bill Beckham and I made countless trips to work with him in the years that followed. Every nook and cranny of the nation was penetrated by multiple cycles of The Year of Equipping. Many denominations embraced the vision of transitioning to cell-based structures.

Over 17,000 churches were transitioned in the years that have followed. Regional conferences were held where as many as 1500 people attended. His ministry also developed children's cell materials for the churches.

I believe that in the history written about this generation, Robert Lay will be remembered as one of the most influential man God anointed to bring a harvest of souls among the Portuguese speaking world. His courage and vision and administrative abilities, along with his gifted teaching skills, made him stand out from his peers. God has used him far beyond Brazil in other nations in South and Central America, even Europe.



In late 1999, I was 70 years old. I had a desire to plant the Touch Family church in Houston once again. I assembled a team of four couples to form a team. Mark McCourt, an Australian, came from serving in a church in Alaska. In South Africa, I had to work closely with Walter Snyman and had been impressed by his son. I brought Peter and his wife to be the second person on the team. A third couple volunteered to come from a ministry in California. A fourth couple were in Houston working with Youth with a Mission.

I invested my own savings heavily to support them. I coached them for many weeks. They had been strategically placed, one couple at the University of Houston and others in regions of the city. As the weeks went by, I became more and more aware that not one of them had produced a new believer. I walked the floor praying, asking the Lord what was wrong. He gave me the answer.

After many months, it was time to release them. I knew I had many contacts with churches and could help all of them find a new place to minister except for Peter, who needed to return to South Africa. I called them together.

What the Lord has showed me is what I told them. Every person has a special gifting for a special area of ministry. A church planter does not perform the same ministry as a worker who is assigned by God to maintain an already established congregation.

I described to them the difference between a Farmer and a Rancher. The Rancher begins with fences and cattle, while the Farmer begins with untilled fields. We reflected together that their former ministries had been as Ranchers, and they were not cut out to be Farmers (church planters).

I think they all recognized this fact, but I have never been certain about that. I remember Mark objected. He remained in Houston and attempted to plant, giving up many months later.

Mark is a brilliant entrepreneur, an engineer, an inventor. He also is anointed by the Holy Spirit. God led him to become the manufacturer of a heating product that is now in homes all over the world. God brought us back together as companions, and today he is one of my dearest friends.



I could not get the burden out of my heart to begin to plant again in Houston. As I prayed about this, I realized I had a major audience in the city who had listened to the Carpool broadcast for 18 years. I contacted KHCB and asked them if I could use their radio studio on Sunday mornings to sponsor a new church. They interviewed me to invite listeners who were interested, offering to equip them.

I prepared a detailed presentation and booked a restaurant where I gathered interested people responding from the radio interviews. About 60 people came, among them Mike McMahon, who handed me a tithe check without being asked! He became a volunteer administrator from that time on.

I arranged a multi-hour Boot Camp retreat to be held at Eagle Lake at the estate of Phil and Linda Ferguson. For 14 hours, we trained together. This affective domain equipping prepared a wonderful team who pioneered, the Touch Family church.

My focus went completely to this ministry. Bill Beckham became my partner. From Brazil, Izes Calheiros begin to work with us as a third Pastor in December 2001.

For a season, we rented a large section of an office building on Richmond Avenue. Instead of creating a normal church auditorium, I discovered that logistically the exact same number of people who would be seated in pews could be seated around round tables in groups of six. What better way to meet for Sunday worship and teaching than by groups? Instead of an auditorium we created a banquet hall, complete with flowered wallpaper.

Each message ended with sharing around the tables. Coffee was served as the meetings began. Instead of having just one presenter, we rotated with the three of us presenting series of messages. Once a month, we remained to have lunch and spent the afternoon equipping the body to implement our cell group's penetration strategy.

In 2002, I formed an internet training school for the cell church world called GLOCAL. Eric Wargo joined our team. For three years, we created many courses in a makeshift television studio. We rented a different part of the building on Richmond Avenue, where Izes supervised GLOCAL.

In 2004, we created a new Touch Ranch outside of Bellville. We begin to do seminars there, inviting churches from different parts of the United States to come for training. The cell groups spent many weekends together there. I have always felt strongly that developing strong community requires living together so there is time to share deeply.

We had started to see that there were two sets of spiritual gifts. The gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to every member of the body so prophesying in the groups would manifest the "spirituals" required to edify, comfort, and exhort.

The fivefold gifts of Christ were given to the body so each person would be equipped for ministry. It was obvious to us that the traditional church was not fulfilling the plan of God for equipping His bride. We further determined that if the apostle, prophet, evangelist, Pastor, and teacher were the Gifts of Christ, they were embryonically existing within the cells. If they were to be raised up, they needed to be identified and then mentored by the mature fivefold.

We had about 350 in the cells at the time. We taught about the fivefold to them in the Sunday messages. We then asked them to identify in each other those who were possibly given the spiritual DNA of one of the five equippers.

This was easily done! Our next step was to draw from each cell those fitting each of the five areas. We then began to have sessions with five of us providing guidance for them to be developed. We gathered in five groups for several months.



At this time, I traveled twice to the Canary Islands to meet with a Pastor and a cell congregation filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. That dear Pastor grasped this truth about the fivefold and implemented it fully, a pioneer demonstrating a lost concept of the Scriptures not being implemented around the world.



In 2007, the congregation had grown to a place where it either had to reproduce itself by multiplying or grow into a megachurch. Two obvious Pastors had emerged, Izes Caheiros and Seumean Kuon. In May of that year, the Touch Family invited Seumean Kuon to pastor while Izes Calheiros, accompanied by Karen Reinhold, form Servant of Nations.

Bill Beckham and I remained as members of the Touch Family. That congregation finally ended in 2017 when Seumean's ministry began to take him to many parts of the world.

Izes, Karen and her husband Dan are still involved in ministering to the Spanish immigrant population that floods the city of Houston. They have a significant food distribution plan on Saturdays that Mike McMahon participates in.

Izes Calheiros is a gifted Bible scholar and author. She has written the award-winning *Dressed for Ministry* and many other books. She regularly returns to Brazil to speak and hold autograph parties.

PART 7: CONCLUDING MINISTRY 2011 - 2019

(Ukraine)

I have reviewed three passports that cover the last period of ministry travel that has taken me to different parts of the world 69 times. I have been living on airplanes for 75 years and dread the idea of taking another trip!

COUNTRIES VISITED, BY YEAR

1990 Spain

1996 South Africa (twice), Colombia, Singapore, England, Australia

1997 Colombia, United Arab Emirates, England, Guatemala, South Africa, (twice), Hong Kong, Brazil (twice), Australia, Netherlands

1998 Hong Kong, Mexico, Brazil

1999 Canada (twice)

2000 Brazil

2001 Hong Kong

2002 Korea, Taiwan

2003 Korea, Brazil (twice), South Africa

2004 —

2005 Korea, Brazil, Indonesia, Singapore

2006 South Africa

2007 Netherlands, El Salvador

2008—

2009 Israel, Jordan, Ivory Coast

2010 Ivory Coast

2011 Ukraine (twice), El Salvador

2012 England, Austria, Ukraine (twice), Singapore, Malaysia, China

2013 Canary Islands (twice), Brazil, Ukraine (twice), South Africa

2014 Ukraine (3 times), Germany

2015 Ukraine, Ivory Coast, Turkey, Brazil



In 2011, I received a telephone call from Stephen Khong in Singapore. Stephen and I have been like brothers ever since we served together at Faith Community Baptist Church.

He told me he had been contacted by a Pastor who needed help developing a cell group church in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine. He strongly encouraged me to accept an invitation to help him. I had spent considerable time in Russia previously and was hesitant at my age to get involved with a new project so far away.

A second telephone call from Stephen insisted that I consider this invitation. I secured the name of the Pastor and inquired about him from my friend in Kiev who directed Pat Robertson's ministry there. He had nothing negative to report about him, but said that he had gained a reputation for being "the Benny Hinn of Ukraine."

Further research uncovered the history of this man. He had been arrested at 14 for stealing and put into a prison with older men. There he learned how to deal drugs.

After release, he did so and met a girl his age who was also a dealer. They were married at 16.

One year later, he was arrested again, and she divorced him. While in prison, he used a huge number of drugs.

Released at 19, his liver stopped working. The doctors told him he was terminally ill and sent him home to die.

At this time, he was intercepted on the street by a young man who witnessed to him and gave him a New Testament. He had no prior knowledge of God and began to read about Jesus. He fasted for several days, seeking to meet God. In a flash of time, he was instantly healed!

Following his conversion, he began to attend the small Bible college that had sponsored the student who witnessed to him. There were about 15 students.

He would go into the parks on Sunday afternoon, collect a crowd, give his testimony, and invite the audience to receive healing from Christ as he had done. He would then sit on a bench and pray. People began to be healed and converted, not by the ones or twos but by the dozens. Thus, he had received this reputation of having the power to heal.

With the students, he prayed for his divorced wife to come to Christ. She did so and joined the Bible college with him. They remarried and began to minister together in a small village. Because of their background, they focused on addicts. It was a very difficult ministry time for them with little income and often little food.

They finally felt they should move to Dnipropetrovsk and plant a church there. God richly blessed that ministry as he invited people to be healed and to receive Christ. He had almost 1000 people meeting with him at the time I flew in to meet him.

My book *Where Do We Go from Here?* had been published by Pat Robertson in Russian and he had studied it. With no help from anyone, he had devised a cell group system.

The English title for persons supervising the cells did not suit him: "Cell Supervisor. He selected Russian words for their titles. I had instructed to put one Cell Supervisor over five cells. With no understanding of Christian denominations, he chose the term "Pentacostals" to describe these supervisors. (*Penta* in Russian is the number five.)

I had explained that over every 100 cells there should be a Zone Supervisor. He named them “Centurions.” (*Centa* in Russian is the number 100.)

I was met at the airport and taken to his home to stay. I was greatly impressed by the atmosphere that surrounded him and his family.

I discovered he had written a book on how to reach the lost for Christ and had my translator review it for me. I caught the heart of this man and was sure he had a passion for souls.

I met a young man on his staff who came to greet me. He shared he had come to Christ several years before and had felt called to serve the Pastor as an intercessor. His primary assignment on the staff was to pray for his Pastor. He did this continually in public services.

I have deliberately not mentioned this Pastor’s name until now. Vladimir. I will not mention his last name at all. This is because he is a work in progress. God may or may not be finished with him. In anticipation of a future repentance in his future life, “I leave him to Papa.”

The first worship service I attended was in a new facility, built by endless hours of labor contributed by the cell members. They literally worked around the clock. An old warehouse was converted by them into a space that seated nearly 1200 people.

I said about halfway back to observe the spirit of the members. They fervently saying one song after another from memory, with no projected words on the screen to help them. After the time of worship, Vladimir spoke to the audience. He explained he would invite the Holy Spirit to come to meet any need, physical or otherwise, in the audience.

It was a humble invitation. He seemed to not want to influence what would happen next. He simply sat down on the steps leading up to the platform, put his hands on his head, and prayed.

I confess I wondered what would happen next! My western brain had been programmed to experience a Sunday morning church service as a formal time where little supernatural activity could be expected. I was thinking he might be embarrassed if nothing happened. Nothing at all had been spoken or taught to lead up to an invitation of this sort.

What I did not understand was that 85% of that audience had already experienced a power encounter with God, either a healing or deliverance from demonic control or a direct answer to a serious emotional issue. He was not alone in expecting the Holy Spirit to take over.

Unlike their western counterparts, these people personally knew the power of God. The other 15% of the audience had been brought by the members because they had not yet experienced the power of God. There was no question in the minds of these members that God would work.

A dead silence was replaced in just a few seconds with weeping. Then wailing began. Then mayhem took place. Several demon-possessed people began to manifest. Others were rejoicing that they had been instantly physically healed. As I looked around, people were not taken to the stage to be ministered to by the faith healer. Instead, members of the audience huddled around them, praying for them. Ministry was taking place in several areas around me.

Some were invited to give their testimony. It was the most authentic movement of the Spirit of God I had experienced in many years. The atmosphere reminded me of what I had felt when I at age 7, saw the powerful revival that broke out in Elyria, Ohio, and our time with Faith Community in Singapore.

The next surprising thing in that service was the sermon. This Pastor was teaching his people from the scripture how to minister as they left the service. The service was an equipping event, a weekly gathering of the members who needed to be prepared for their ministry. Pens and notebooks worked overtime as he spoke. I observed an army being prepared for spiritual battle.

The Pastor's wife took me to a typical Russian apartment building where we climbed several flights of stairs to a small room where 11 people had gathered for a cell meeting. Two searching unbelievers were present.

Ukrainian food was spread across a large table, typical for all cell group meetings. I saw God at work in the lives of those seekers present. This convinced me that God had opened a door for me that I almost closed. I bowed my head in prayer, thanking Him for being patient with me and leading me to this group.

I stayed for a week. Every morning when I awakened, the large lounge room was filled with the Centurions. They were eager to learn, and the day would fly by as they soaked up everything I taught.

Late one afternoon as I was going to rest, Vladimir asked me to come with him to pray with a woman who had been brought by taxi to his house for prayer she would be healed. I learned that this happened often to him.

He listened silently as the woman shared her fight with cancer and then prayed fervently for her. She attended the worship services after that, stretched out a cot before she was finally healed. The Pastor taught clearly that it was up to God whether a healing happened instantly or over time, as Scripture taught.

You'll notice in the itinerary list above that I made a second trip in 2011 to work with this church. During the first trip, I had contacted the office of Pat Robertson in Kiev to see if any of my equipping booklets in Russian were still in existence from their printing years before? I learned that they were still being distributed. Since I had given them all the rights to publishing them in Russian, they offered to send me whatever I needed. What a blessing! I gave the church permission to begin to publish my equipping books and use them with all the members.

I secured copies of the Russian version of the Touching Hearts daily growth guide for the entire congregation. On my second trip I used it to teach several hundred cell members.

They immediately began to witness personally to others. Until this time, they had only brought people to the services to experience a power encounter but had not been trained how to be involved in personal evangelism.

The results were amazing! After six months, I received a photograph that showed the congregation had doubled in size.

The church had an annual month-long gathering called "The Mountain of Moses." Some speakers were brought from overseas, to be included with teaching from the Pastor and his staff.

I prepared a special series of training modules that would be inserted into every Mountain in future years. I usually went to teach in the Mountain and would stay for a month each time.

The church expanded and opened a second Center in Kiev. The mountain of Moses moved to the huge sports stadium there that seated 12,000 people. I devised a strategy that sent the delegates into the subway stations and surrounding areas to witness as a part of their training. This led to a special Sunday service in the stadium where delegates brought seeking unbelievers they had uncovered through the project. The church continued to expand rapidly.

In his earliest days as a believer, Vladimir had won to Christ five young men his own age. As they entered different business ventures, they met regularly with him and together shared a vision for his ministry. God blessed these men and they became extremely wealthy. This provided a source of funds far beyond what the tithes and offerings of the Ukrainian church members could provide.

It amounted to millions of dollars. With these funds, churches were planted in Ukraine, Russia, and other surrounding countries. Four television satellites provided a 24-hour telecast that covered seven time zones of the Russian speaking world.

I suggested that we begin to offer cell groups to be formed by the listening audience. These cells began to appear in many nations. Russian speakers in other countries, including North America and even Israel, began to form cell groups. Over 300 began in the first year.

The businessmen also purchased for the church a large retreat site owned by the communist party of Russia just outside Kiev. It contained a five-story hotel that was used to train Pastors.

The potential students were drawn from the Mountains of Moses. I prepared a 72-page document to equip the students to penetrate new area. I flew over two times to teach it. It was televised for training future classes.

In the hotel, a large room was set up with many computers. Volunteers served as the first cell leaders for Internet cell groups. Cots were provided for those leaders, because seven time zones were involved.

The Internet cells drew more and more people to the Mountain of Moses. I began to project that this movement of God could become one of the strongest in our generation!

As I reflect, I should have expected Satan would viciously attack the movement. What was the weakest link he could use to break the chain of growth? I never sensed it coming in advance. The weak link was Vladimir!

My last trip was in 2018. I taught at the mountain of Moses. A gifted young lady named Alina Radionova assisted Ruth and me during that month. Alina was the daughter of a woman who pastored one of the churches affiliated with the movement led by Vladimir.

She had just been married and had a precious little girl. She had risen from being Vladimir's private secretary to managing the entire television ministry, numbering about 100 employees in the Ukraine and Germany.

The millions of dollars available to him slowly changed his personality. He began to buy expensive cars, homes, even a yacht. He also began to use drugs again.

I was not aware of this, even during my last visit. He announced to me then he was going to enter a new phase of ministry. He planned to become an evangelist to the entire Russian world, using television.

He left the church in Ukraine and set up headquarters in Thailand. He took many young women and men with him to assist him. He set up a small television studio and began to televise, using satellites being paid for by the church he no longer pastored, although he kept the title.

Not knowing any of this, I had been working with Alina from my home in Houston. I was videotaping again the "Cover the Bible" series. They would be voice-overed and satellited to Russians. Weeks of work were already invested in this videotaping. I had almost daily communication back-and-forth with Alina during this time.

Suddenly, she was not answering me. I would learn something was terribly wrong!

Vladimir had called her to come to Thailand. She was unaware that he had been raping women on his team for several years. When he abused her also on that trip, she made a quick excuse and fled home to Kiev. On May 29, 2019, she and her husband and daughter flew to Germany to escape him.

I was completely shattered by this news! It was almost as severe as discovering that my precious Ruth had just died. How could this be? What a fool! To be so anointed and turn away from the sacredness of it all, to live like a pig wallowing in mud.

Not only had his personal life deteriorated, but he had embezzled funds from the ministry. At the time Alina left, she recorded these possessions he personally held title to:

The list of Vladimir's properties

In Kiev:

- Two houses on retreat center

- Three apartments in Kiev

Crimea: three apartments

Odessa: one apartment

Dnepr: one house and three apartments

Germany: one house in Offenbach and 3 story office building

Belarus: one house

Thailand: three fancy villas

Six pieces of land in Kiev

Cars:

Range Rover Luma CLR

BMW B7 Alpina

BMW M7

Maserati GT

Jaguar

Porsche Cayenne GTS

BMW B6 Alpina

BMW M5 e-drive

Mazda 3

BMW X5 M

Ford Fusion

Bikes:

BMW RR1000

Honda CBR600

Harley V-Rod Muscle

Kawasaki Ninja

Three Water Bikes

Vessel: Sea Line 60Ft VIPs Princess cost 450000€



I immediately began to help Alina and her husband to bring them to America. During this time, Vladimir called me from Thailand. He was trying to discover if I knew her whereabouts. He never learned that from me. It was the last time we ever spoke.

I arranged for Alina and her husband to visit a dear Pastor friend in Switzerland I had worked with for many years. I knew they needed healing and they would enter an atmosphere of love that was desperately needed.

I contacted a lawyer in Houston to help me develop the proper procedures for them to immigrate. I also contacted Kenton Slabaugh, Pastor of Restoration Fellowship in Sarasota, Florida and asked him to invite them to serve in his cell ministry. In September 2019, they arrived in Sarasota.

I arranged for Kenton to become a coach to a network of Pastors in the Ukraine who withdrew along with Alina's mother from Vladimir's organization. I packed up all my video equipment and shipped it to Alina.

Kenton has videotaped many equipping messages that have been voice overed into Russian and sent to them. He has also made two trips this far to coach them. I thank God that I could make one more contribution to a bad situation.

Vladimir was arrested along with all his young people and put into a Thailand prison. He had collected all passports from the team and had neglected to renew any visas. All were illegally staying in the country. They were imprisoned for six weeks.

Warrants for his arrest were filed in Kiev for statutory rapes. The nation is so corrupt that money can buy anything, including freedom for a person who should be prosecuted.

He returned to pastor the church in Kiev. Everything has collapsed. The businessmen no longer support him. There is no longer any television. Little is heard about his ministry.

Is this the end of his story? Only God knows. What should take place in the life of an anointed man who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage? "Leave him to Papa!"



After I left the Ukraine in 2018, I flew to be with my dear friend Dion Robert in the Ivory Coast to celebrate with him a half a century of ministry. On my first trip to him with Jack Taylor, he had 9000 people in his cell-based congregation. At the time of this trip, the churches in his care around the World numbered a quarter of a million!

A Celebration was planned be held in the largest stadium in the nation seating 70,000 people. Many dignitaries were invited, including the King of all the tribes of Africa.

Only a few Westerners are aware that when European nations began to divide up the continent of Africa, they paid no attention to the tribal boundaries that for centuries had a system of tribal Kings. The tribal kings elected one amongst them to be the King of Africa. This King was invited to greet the Celebration.

Seated on the platform, his group approached us. Dressed in skins and a golden crown, followed by guards with spears and shields, came the King over all African tribes.

We all rose to greet him. He paused a moment and stared at me, and I bowed to him. He addressed the crowd with a booming voice. I thought he was bringing greetings in his official position, but he was declaring he was a follower of Christ. As his procession left the stage, we greeted each other again.

The visiting dignitaries from around the world were then invited to his palace for a meal. When I arrived, I was seated to his left. His two guards with their spears and shields stood behind him. As the meal was served, a large piece of tender meat was placed before him. He ate it with his fingers and then rubbed the grease into his hair.

Following the meal, Dion Robert recited from memory the research he had done about the history of tribes in Africa. Following that, the King announced that he wanted to tell us the story of his conversion.

While previously the king of one tribe, he was obligated to promote the worship of the tribal deity. He had a teenage son he sent to a Christian school to be educated. At age 16 he returned home to announce to his father he had become a follower of Christ.

This was a political humiliation for a king obligated to promote the worship of another God. He angrily cast the boy out of his home and disowned him. Although his son could have gone to another part of Africa, God kept him in that very town. He was homeless as a beggar for two years.

One day his father passed by in his limousine and recognized him. He beckoned him into the car and took him home. He said to him, "If Jesus meant that much to you, I would like to know more."

The son led his father to receive Christ. His son then joined us, by then in his middle 20s, and shared with us the joy of living in the home of a Christian father.

As the evening progressed, Dion Robert introduced me and recounted our many years of ministry together. When I stood to be recognized, the King walked over and kneeled before me!

He looked up at me and asked me to bless him. I immediately remembered the time I had met Haile Selassie in Jamaica, and how I had to bow before him. Profoundly embarrassed, I dropped to my knees to join him, kneeling.

I laid my hands on his head and prayed a blessing over him. Unfortunately, although he could rise easily, this old man could not stand without help. The king lovingly put out his hand and pulled me to my feet.

He then explained to us that when he moved into this residence, the first thing he did was to erect a Prayer Tower. He explained he climbed it every morning to pray.

He invited us all to climb the tower with him, to see his throne there. The tower was about the size of an automobile garage. When we climb three stories, we came to the prayer room where a simple throne faced a Bible on a small table in front of it and on the wall was a painting of the Last Supper.

Although I felt he should have asked Dion to do this, he summoned me to sit on the throne and pray for his work as he ruled over Africa's tribes. I treasure my photos taken that night.

This would be my last time to visit these various continents. It was a great thrill to have this wonderful event inserted into my memories. And with that I close my story.

AFTER WORDS

I look forward to the moment when I step out of my Boot Camp Basic Training on this earth and enter the complete personality that is unblemished by sin in the coming kingdom of God. I have sought to serve him faithfully to the end of this part of my existence.

I long to be assigned that final task waiting for me when I become his forever servant in eternity. With you, I shall stand at the Bema judgment seat. There, a good deal of the days I lived will go up in smoke as burned wood, hay, stubble.

Should there be any gold and silver and precious stones left, I shall place them at the feet of my Savior and Lord, for any contributions made through me was because He chose to reside inside my skin. He lived and moved in my being, that he might reveal who He is through what He created me to be. I give to him all the glory and the honor.

Ralph

PENNED WORDS OF A SERVANT

- Witness, Take the Stand! 1967
- The Seven Last Words of the Church Zondervan, 1971; Broadman, 1981
- Target Group Evangelism with Cal Thomas 1974
- This Gift Is Mine 1974
- Journey Into Discipleship 1974
- Singapore Urban Strategy 1975
- Wai Kong, Singapore Boy (Comic Book) 1976 with cartoonist Joe McKeever
- Successful Living Correspondence Course 1976
- Handbooks of Structured Experiences for Friendship Groups 1975-6
 - Guitar Lessons Leader's Guide
 - Guitar Lessons Student's Manual
 - How To Fall in Love Successfully Leader's Guide
 - How To Fall in Love Successfully Student's Manual
 - Personality Development Leader's Guide
 - Personality Development Student's Manual
 - Interior Decorating Leader's Guide
 - Interior Decorating Student's Manual
 - Lonely People Leader's Guide
 - Lonely People Student's Manual
 - How To Study More Effectively Leader's Guide
 - How To Study More Effectively Student's Manual
 - Conversational English Leader's Guide
 - Conversational English Student's Manual
 - How To Choose the Right Career Leader's Guide
- Survival Kit for New Christians, Adult Edition 1979
Also in Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Tagalog, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Italian, Vietnamese, African Trade Languages, Dutch, etc.
- Survival Kit for New Christians, Youth Edition 1980
- The Journey Continues, Survival Kit II 1984
- Touch Basic Training 1980; released in Spanish, 1988
 - Includes 6 hours of video in English and Spanish
- Sponsor's Guidebook 1995
- The Shepherd's Guidebook 1992
- Where Do We Go from Here? 1990
- Beginning the Journey: Entering the Kingdom of God with Jim Egli 2010
- The Arrival Kit 1994
- Future Church 1980
- Christ's Basic Bodies 2010
- How Do We Get There from Here? With Scott Boren 2011
- Touching Hearts 2001
- A How-To Guide for Mentoring Another Christian 2010
- Making Cell Groups Work Navigation Guide with M. Scott Boren et al. 2003

- Transforming Your Church with M. Scott Boren 2003
- Welcome to Your Changed Life 2001
- Beginning the Journey 2004
- Building Groups Opening Hearts 1992 With Bob Mckeever
- Building Bridges Opening Hearts 1992 With Bob Mckeever
- Building Awareness Opening Hearts 1992 With Bob Mckeever
- Knocking on Door, Opening Hearts 1990
- Life Basic Training - Parenthesis Drug Abuse Prevention Library 1993
- Mastering Management in The Church 1996 With Ed Roebert
- Cell Leader Intern Trainer's Guide