

My

Life

As

A

Pastor

Shepherding God's Sheep

And

Herding Goats

By

Burley W. Moore

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All scripture references are taken from the King James Version
of the Holy Bible.

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DEDICATION

The first book that I wrote and published was dedicated to my dear wife. I now dedicate this, my second book, to our three precious children. Julie, born March 1, 1970, Stuart, born September 12, 1973, and Wilson, born December 1, 1977. Our children have taught me so very much about parenting and especially about my relationship with my Heavenly Father as one of His dear “little children” (I Jh. 3:18).

I have not been a perfect father, any more than I have been a perfect husband, nor a perfect pastor. Through all of my mistakes, there is one thing that I can honestly say, “all that I ever wanted for my children, my family, and the churches that I pastored, was God’s best.” To all whom I have wronged and failed in any way, I ask forgiveness and request prayer for my sanctification.

All of our children grew up as PK’s (preacher’s kids). Some men enter the ministry later in life, but I became a pastor before I became a daddy. There are some PK’s that grow up and leave the church. I’m afraid it’s because they grow up seeing the good, bad, and ugly of church life. They witness congregational life in the raw! When they see first hand how many professing believers act in ungodly ways and hear the wicked things that some church folk say to their parents and to their daddy in particular, it can turn them off. For that reason, I kept telling my children “to keep their eyes on Jesus.” People will disappoint you and let you down, but our God will never fail His people.

I’ve heard it jokingly said, “Preachers kids behave so badly because they play with the deacon’s kids.” I’m afraid that another reason why PK’s get turned off from the church is because of the first hand hypocrisy they experience. I wish that much of what you’re going to read about in this book were not true and that our children didn’t have to grow up being exposed to it. I remind them, as well as all that read this book, that if you live for Christ and stand for the Truth of His Word, you will suffer for it. I must admit that writing this book hasn’t been easy for me. The reason being, it has opened up some old wounds.

However, it has also brought much joy to my heart as I have reflected upon the many wonderful people that God brought into our lives down through the years. The good days have far outnumbered the bad days and the Lord has been much better to me than what I deserve. God has reminded me of how He fought my battles and how He will see me through this life victoriously to the other side where I shall see Jesus face to face.

It is with more love than they will ever know that I love our children and dedicate this written record of my ministerial career. I'm sure that it will bring back a lot of memories for them, but I also hope that it will prove to be helpful, humorous, challenging, inspiring, and encouraging to those who read it. Especially, to men who have answered the call of God to preach and teach His Word as a pastor.

Most pastors are husbands and fathers. We must keep our priorities in order and never neglect our families for the sake of the church. The pastor must never allow himself to be married to his pastorate. I've heard it asked something like this, "what good does it do if a man wins the whole world, but loses his own family?" Let's not forget the admonition, "husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church" (Eph. 5:25). The Psalmist reminds us that "children are an heritage of the Lord" (Ps. 127:3). As our children look back over the years, I hope that they will remember how faithful God was to us and how He supplied our every need. There has always been "meal" at the bottom of the "barrel" (I Kings 17:16).

Preface

During the time of Christ's earthly ministry, shepherding was a major occupation. There was an invisible, but noticeable bond between the "shepherd" and the "sheep" (Jh. 10:1-39). Christ used this occupation to illustrate His relationship with His people. We're all familiar with the 23rd Psalm, which is one of the best pictures of an eastern shepherd. In that passage, David declares, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." From his experience as a shepherd boy, he likens Christ as the "shepherd" over His own.

Scripture teaches that Jesus Christ is the "great shepherd" (Heb. 13:20) of His sheep. God chose to use little sheep to figuratively describe those who belong to Him. Throughout the Bible, God teaches us about His care and preservation of the saints (Isa. 53:6, I Pet. 2:25) through the use of sheep. By nature, sheep are relatively dumb animals and for that reason, need the oversight, protection, guidance, and feeding of a shepherd. Sheep were classified as clean animals describing Christians who have been cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus. Sheep flock together, like believers who should desire fellowship with the body of Christ. Sheep are harmless creatures, describing how saints are to be meek, humble, and peace loving. Unfortunately, sheep are given to wandering, reminding us of how we battle the flesh. Sheep were used in Old Testament sacrifices, reminding New Testament believers that we are to present our "bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). In the Old Testament, the sheep died for the shepherd, but in the New Testament, the "good shepherd" (Jh. 10:11) died for His sheep.

In His physical absence from earth, God has called out under-shepherds to protect, care for, and nurture His sheep. Today, we refer to these under-shepherds as pastors. Those sheep don't belong to us. They are His sheep because He has purchased them with His own blood. Christ is the "chief shepherd" and what a privilege it is to serve as one of His under-shepherds. It is a calling that should not be taken lightly. However, it's not an easy

job and sometimes requires fighting off the thieves, robbers, and wolves that seek to devour God's sheep.

Neither is it easy, because sometimes people pretend to be sheep when they are not. We refer to these as sheep in wolves clothing (Acts 20:29). God-called pastors of today will have to deal with all kinds of folk, even "goats" (Matt.25:32). Just as Scripture likens God's people to "sheep," it likens unregenerate people to "goats." There are many ways to distinguish the difference between a sheep and a goat, but the 10th chapter of John reminds us that Jesus said, His "sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers ... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Yes! It may sometimes seem like the pastor is in the livestock or barnyard business. He may find himself having to deal with possums, rattlesnakes, skunks, porcupines, jackasses, and goats. But, the joy of his ministry is tending to God's "sheep," making sure that he feeds "the flock of God" (I Pet. 5:2) with "the bread of life" (Jh. 6:35) and "living water" (Jh. 4:10-14). Those who are truly God's "sheep" will want sheep food and nothing else will spiritually satisfy.

Introduction

When I first entered the ministry, my thoughts of being a pastor were from the land of make-believe. Looking back on it after all these years of ministry, I can say that being a pastor was not anything like what I thought it was going to be. My expectations were high to say the least. In fact, I thought when I started out in the ministry that it was going to be a perfect work, like heaven on earth. You must remember that I began in the ministry at an early age and I had so much to learn (and still do for that matter).

Let me say from the outset that I had not been raised nor lived in a cocoon all my life up to the point of entering the ministry. I grew up dealing with the public in my parents business, but I just thought that people in the church were going to be different. That is, different in a good sort of way. I knew that dealing with people could be challenging to say the least, but I assumed that all church people were going to be absolutely adorable.

I grew up in church. For the most part, I had seen church life from the pew, but not from the pulpit. I grew up not being exposed to roast preacher. There was one occasion that I remember taking place when I was near my early teens. The church where we held membership at that time “got it in for the pastor” and fired him. To this day, I remember him standing in front of the church with tears running down his face asking the church to pray for him instead of talking about him. Even through that ordeal, my parents stood by that pastor and his family. They treated all our pastors well and I thought that most everybody was like that. My, my, did I not have a rude awakening in store for me!

On more than one occasion was I to find out that my expectations of a heaven on earth would turn out to be a hell on earth. To this young naïve preacher boy, God had a lot of lessons to teach. I thought that the firing of our pastor like the one that took place when I was a young boy was an isolated case. Little did I know that the firing of preachers would someday reach near

epidemic proportion in the Southern Baptist Convention, as well as in our nation, before I reached the age of retirement.

Many times, I felt like the apostle Peter (Matt. 26:70-72) in the way he denied his Lord. However, even though I hang my head in shame and admit to having been unfaithful to my Lord so many times, my Lord has always remained faithful to me. I know that He does not tolerate sin, but I'm thankful that He is tolerant with sinners. When I use the word tolerant, I mean that God is patient and long-suffering toward sinners. I'm well aware of the fact that God hates sin. All we have to do to see how much God hates sin is to look at Calvary and be reminded of Christ's death on the cross for our sin. But, as we see Christ's dying for the penalty of sin, we are also reminded that His love for undeserving sinners is what kept Him on the cross.

I've never been good at singing, but I love good godly music. Not necessarily that which passes for "music" today, but hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16) that edify the soul. Even simple songs like "Jesus Loves Me" and "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" blesses my soul. As a little boy growing up I learned that Jesus loved me and as I have grown now to be a "senior citizen," I look back over my few short years and see how faithful my God has been to this poor undeserving soul.

Speaking of singing, I enrolled in a music class during my high school years. I wanted to learn how to sing. After a short time in the class, the music teacher intimidated me so badly that she even asked if I wanted to drop her class and take something else. I thought that one went to school to learn. Well, I learned that not all teachers were willing to take the time to help the student. Some of the teachers that I had in my growing up years were more of a discouragement than an encouragement. Even after graduation and going to one of our Baptist Colleges, I became even more discouraged. I guess that God was preparing me to deal with and face the discouraging situations of life.

My main reason for writing this book is for men, starting out in the ministry, to know what it's really like trying to serve the Lord. . To these men who have been called of God to "preach the Word" (II Tim. 4:2), I remind you that He has promised to "never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). There is nothing

easy about Christian ministry. It is hard! Discouragement is one of the greatest things with which a pastor must deal. It often seems like we take one step forward and two steps backward. But, if God has called you, He will sustain you and be faithful in caring for you, even when church people disappoint you, break your heart, and stomp your guts out.

Some people may even question the reason for me writing about the subjects that I've included in this book. I'm sure that I will be criticized and accused of being too negative. I wish that life were filled with nothing but positive experiences. However, we're living in a fallen world and dealing with sinners. Living for Christ is not all peaches and cream. It's not a bed full of roses. There is "joy" (I Pet. 4:13) in serving Jesus, but there is also conflict from an antagonistic world (Jh. 15:18). The apostle Paul went so far as to name call troublemakers who made spiritual "shipwreck" of their lives (I Tim. 1:19-20) and, no doubt, caused problems in the church. God's Word doesn't tell everything through rose colored glasses and neither will I.

What I'm going to write about in this book is a true and accurate account of my experiences covering over forty years of ministry. It needs to be noted that the events and episodes are NOT in chronological order, except for the telling of my life up to the beginning of my public ministry. Everything that I write about afterwards will NOT be in the sequence of my pastorates or ministerial service. Neither will any name of any person dealing with my pastorates be mentioned in this "tell all" book. It's not my intention to call names, but simply "tell it like it is." I've often said that people tell you more about themselves than what others tell you about them.

When I changed pastorates, it didn't take me long to discover the troublemakers. That's because they all have the same father with the same devilish family characteristics. If you have seen one, you've seen them all. They all act the same, talk the same, and treat you the same. Some are just worse than others are, but they all smell alike. Even the hypocrites use the same perfume and cologne. Those to whom I'm referring are those to whom Jesus spoke when He said, "ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (Jh. 8:44).

I've said all of the above so that those who know me and have been a part of my pastorates down through the years, will not try to fit the telling of this book into chronological sequence. Some of you will identify with the telling of my story and will know exactly to whom I am referring. Some who read this book have stood with me through "thick and thin" and held up my arms like Aaron and Hur did for Moses (Ex. 17:12). Some who read this book might even be among the guilty that I would protect by leaving nameless. If anyone is offended by the telling of these events, that alone should be cause to repent and ask God for forgiveness. My aim is not to hurt anyone, but to tell the truth. I've spent my life proclaiming the Truth and I'm not afraid to tell it and to stand upon it. Jesus said that He is "the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (Jh. 14:6). That "truth shall make you free" (Jh. 8:32).

When I resigned one of my pastorates, a woman in the congregation told my wife, something to the affect, that I was too truthful. How can any Christian, much less a pastor, be too truthful in his personal or professional life? What kind of a church wants a pastor who is not honest and known for his integrity? I believe that such a congregation is described as one that "will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:3-4).

Following these words, Paul went on to write to Timothy saying, "But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (II Tim. 4:5). In other words, there is coming a day when our life's work will be over and God's call upon our life will come to an end on this earth. When that day comes, I'm sure that you want to say, as do I, "for I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Tim. 4:6-8).

Chapter 1

In The Beginning

It's been said that the best place to start the telling of one's life story is "in the beginning." Therefore, I shall begin with my birth, which occurred on July 13, 1946, in Greensboro, North Carolina. I was born to Wade Graves Moore and Hilda Goolsby Moore. Both of my parents were born in Rockingham County, North Carolina, and grew up on farms in the Stokesdale and Summerfield areas that were north of Greensboro. They moved to Greensboro as soon as they were old enough to leave the farm. Both of my parents took jobs in a textile plant called Blue Bell.

They eventually married and later my older brother was born. Seven years after his birth, I came along and was named "Burley." I've asked my mother on several occasions why she chose that name and have received different answers, but for the most part I guess it was a name that she liked. I never heard of anyone else by that name until I was grown, but my wife tells me that the name fits me because of all the difficult things that I had to stand up and deal with in the churches where I pastored.

My brother and I were never close and to this day I have no contact with him. My father had a back operation before I was born that left him crippled and having to use crutches to walk. He was a very remarkable man in the sense that he did not feel sorry for himself and was determined to keep going regardless of his handicap. Actually, I never saw my father as handicapped. After his back surgery that removed a benign tumor from his spinal column at the age of twenty-six, he left his position with Blue Bell because he was no longer able to do that particular job. Therefore, he went to Watchmaking School and opened his own jewelry store. Later, he kept his jewelry business, trained my uncle to do the watch making trade, and went into the clothing business with a neighbor.

Twenty-six years after his first operation, he had a second one that left him confined to a wheelchair. However, this didn't stop him from operating his business or doing anything else that he set his mind to. My mother also worked in the business. At

first, she only worked on weekends, but some years later, she began putting in full time hours.

As a child, I grew up in my parents clothing store, which my father eventually bought out in full from his partner. It was always my father's desire for me to take over his business. I remember as a small child doing little jobs around the store and even waiting on customers. That's the only job I ever had until my older teenage years. My daddy told me that if I worked for him, he would buy me a car when I turned sixteen years of age. I worked for practically nothing. My daddy was a tough man to work for and expected a lot from his employees including me. But, I really didn't know any better as a child.

Eventually, I worked my way up to \$5.00 per week by the time I was sixteen years old and reminded my daddy of what he had promised me concerning the car. We went looking for an automobile and found one at Black Cadillac Olds. It was a four-door, green, ten year old 1952 Oldsmobile that got about ten miles to a gallon. He bought it for me at the cost of \$200.00 and I thought that I was in "hog heaven." I was thrilled, but I quickly discovered one big problem. It cost me \$5.00 to fill up the car with gas (remember the good old days when gas was 29 cents per gallon?). This means that I only made \$5.00 per week and had no money left for anything else. After I negotiated and pointed this out to my daddy, he gave me \$10.00 per week for my weekly wages. From this amount, I paid my tithe, put gasoline in the car, and had the rest for my own pleasure. As you can figure, I couldn't have a great deal of pleasure on the remaining amount.

I continued to work in the family business, even after I graduated from high school and went off to college. Almost every weekend I came home and worked in the family business. However, by this time, I felt God's call upon my life. My daddy especially, wasn't very thrilled about this. In fact, he was flat out angry at the very thought. He had planned for me to take over the business and that's all there was to it. Needless to say, this began a conflict that would exist for years to come. I can certainly understand how a father would desire for his son to continue the family business, but as Christians, we must above all else, try to seek and follow God's will and not our own.

When it came time for me to have my wisdom teeth removed, I was admitted to Wesley Long Hospital (that's the way it was done back in those days). I spent one night in the hospital, but my father was so angry with me for wanting to get a job outside the family business, he never came to the hospital. I remember him giving me the cold shoulder when I got home and all he ever said to me was, "how you doing?" But, he did pay my hospital bill for which I'm thankful. As a child, I was very blessed. My parents cared and provided for me. I never went to bed hungry, had good clothes to wear, and lived in a nice house in a good community.

I know that my parents loved me, but as I shall tell in more detail later in this book, there is a lot of hurt that I must live with and by God's grace I will not dwell on the past. Shortly before my daddy died, I remember telling him that I knew how much he wanted me to take his business, but my Heavenly Father had a higher calling for me. I had to be obedient to my God and for that I have no regrets. When I told him what I did, I cannot recall my daddy saying a word.

No child has ever had perfect parents and no parent has ever had a perfect child, except for Mary and Joseph. They were not perfect parents, but God entrusted to them the One and Only perfect Child, the Lord Jesus. We cannot begin to imagine what it would be like to raise such a child. I was certainly no perfect kid to which my parents would have attested. However, I'm thankful that God saved me by His grace, gave me a new nature, and a desire to serve Him with my life.

"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (Deut. 6:5)

Chapter 2

I've Been Thinking

I grew up in church. To this day, I still have my cradle role certificate from the old Asheboro Street Baptist Church that was located in South Greensboro. I'm thankful that my parents took me to church where I was exposed to the things of God. Many children don't have that privilege today. When I was in the junior department, our local church started a mission that met in what was then, Brooks Elementary School. The mission was later organized into a self supporting congregation and named Parkway Baptist Church. After several years of meeting in the school, a permanent location was secured and a building constructed on Benjamin Parkway in the northwestern sector of Greensboro.

My family was one of about two hundred people who went with the group from the mother church to help start the mission. While we were attending the mission, our pastor would preach an early service at the mission and then rush back to the mother church for their regularly scheduled service. It was during this time that I was only a ten-year-old boy. I don't guess I knew any other way of putting it, but I'm just going to tell you what happened. It's as clear to me today as it was then.

We came home from church one Sunday evening when I remember wondering into my mother's room. I said to her, "I've been thinking about joining the church lately and one of these days I might even be a preacher." I realize now that I needed to do more than join a church, but that would soon be clarified to me in just a few short days after making that statement to my mother.

Nothing else was said about the matter, but two days later on a Tuesday afternoon, February 26, 1957, I was doing what ten-year-old boys are not supposed to be doing, bouncing up and down on the green sofa in my parent's living room. There was a big picture window in the living room and as I was bouncing, I looked out the window and saw our pastor, Dr. A. Leroy Parker, drive his car into our driveway. I remember thinking; "he's come

to tell me about Jesus.” The Holy Spirit had already begun doing His work in my heart. I’ll always be grateful for the way God used my mother in having the pastor come and share the Gospel with me.

My pastor came to the door, I let him in, and we sat on that green sofa side by side. He opened the Word of God and told me about Jesus. I remember him reading John 3:16 and I remember learning how Jesus died for my sins. I trusted Jesus as my Savior, Lord, and Master. As a ten-year-old boy, Jesus saved me and made me a new creature in Christ.

As a kid, I had a bad habit of telling people to “shut up.” That’s just one area where the Holy Spirit started dealing with me. I remember the Lord speaking to my heart, telling me that I was not to talk to people like that because now I was a Christian. That may sound elementary, but God deals with us at all levels of our understanding, even children.

My life has never been the same since that February day. I did identify with our local church and shared with the congregation of what happened to me on March 3, 1957. Later, my pastor baptized me on a Wednesday night, March 27, 1957, in the pool of Asheboro Street Baptist Church.

We attended Parkway Baptist Church until I was about sixteen years old. I was looking for a youth group with whom I could better identify and so we returned to Asheboro Street Baptist Church. It was during this time that Asheboro Street Baptist was making plans to relocate their facilities to what was then Friendly Road. The new church plant was going to be built near where we lived, but most of all; I found a group of young people that became a wonderful blessing to my life. One of those youth was a young man by the name of Jerry Stanley (he also entered the ministry) who remained one of my best friends until his death that occurred during the writing of this book.

Eventually, the new church campus was completed and we made the move along with their name change from the old Asheboro Street Baptist Church to Friendly Road Baptist Church. Later, when Friendly Road was changed to Friendly Avenue, so was the name of the church, Friendly Avenue Baptist Church.

Chapter 3

A Divine Call

From the time of my conversion, I never can remember a day when I didn't read from the Word of God. As I grew to be a teenager, I began asking God what He wanted me to do with my life. When I was about sixteen years of age, I felt a unique call of God upon my life. The Lord spoke to my heart just as loud and clear saying, "Burley Wade Moore, you are not just to be a minister, but a minister of the Holy Scriptures." I cannot explain it, but all I know is that I had an encounter with God and knew that He had called me to serve Him the remainder of my life. It was an encounter with God that reminded me of Samuel's experience as recorded in the Third Chapter of Second Samuel when God called him as a young lad into spiritual service.

I was always a shy and bashful type of kid. I'm sure that part of the reason for me being that way is because I was born an introvert. Another reason that did not help the situation, is the way I was cursed as a child and during my growing up years. This lowered my self-esteem and made me feel so good for nothing. Whenever I was cursed in front of people and they would laugh at me, I cannot begin to tell you how it made me feel inside. That hurt me so deeply. Looking back on it now, I can see that it was nothing but God's grace that caused me to continue loving he who cursed me so badly.

When God called me to serve Him, I knew that He wanted me to preach, but I was not a public speaker. I had trouble standing on my two feet and thinking at the same time. Those were the days of Training Union in the Southern Baptist Church. I didn't look forward to having a "part," but I tried with much embarrassment. I even enrolled in the speech class in high school trying to overcome my timidity. My speech teacher was very helpful and encouraging. I entered the school's speaking contest where the finals were held in a local radio station. When I went into the studio and got behind the microphone, my mind went blank, and I made a fool of myself. My speech teacher never said a word to me. I'm sure that she knew how humiliated I felt.

I'll never forget taking part in the North Carolina Baptist Speakers Tournament. I didn't win the "contest," but it was a good experience. My pastor even asked me to give my "speech" to our congregation. I've said all of that to say that I tried to overcome my fear of public speaking, knowing that God had called me to preach. However, just like most God called preachers that I've known, I tried to resist the call. I told the Lord that I would be an educational director or do some other type of "church work," but not preach. My desire was to "work behind the scenes" (so to speak), hoping not to be a public speaker.

For several years I ran from God's call and struggled with it. Finally, on June 6, 1967, I dedicated my life to serve my Lord and do whatever He wanted me to do. If He wanted me to preach, then He would have to make me a preacher. I had no natural ability to speak. I did not like school. I did not like to study. Now, God was calling me to spend my life in the study and teaching of His Word. Of all people, I was the most unlikely person ever born to do such a thing.

God's Word has given me much comfort in saying that, "ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Cor. 1:26-29).

I never was a good student and never liked going to school. But, I knew that a call to serve the Lord was a call to prepare. I wanted to attend a Bible school where I could do what I wanted to do, and that was study God's Word. However, I was persuaded to enroll in one of our Baptist Colleges that was supported by our State Convention. I began my first semester and I hated it. I hated the environment. It reminded me of my heathen high school and I was not a happy camper. Much to the dismay of many, I dropped out near the end of the first semester and enrolled in Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute. It was and still is a wonderful school that helps prepare people for Christian ministry.

When it came time for the summer break, our pastor's wife, Mrs. Sarah Parker, asked if I wanted a job cleaning our church at Friendly Avenue. She informed me that their custodian had quit and they were in need of someone to do the janitorial work. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to work in God's house. I took the job and worked until the close of the summer. It was during this time that our church educational director, Robert Stewart, was so very good to me. I remember the week that the church had VBS. He asked me to teach in the mornings and told me that I could do my cleaning work in the afternoon. It was also during this time that Dr. Parker was away one Wednesday evening and he placed Robert in charge of the mid-week service. When Robert asked me if I wanted to speak on that Wednesday night, I was thrilled beyond measure. That was my first opportunity at trying to preach a sermon. I still remember the subject of my message. I'm really embarrassed to tell you what it was, but I'll tell you anyway. It was on the "signs of the times." Looking back on it, I would call it pathetic, especially since I didn't know anything about eschatology.

At the end of that summer, I began having some real serious struggles with my call and didn't return to Fruitland when the new school year began. Instead, I enrolled in Piedmont Bible College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, but dropped out after a few weeks. I was working full time for my parents, running a shoe store that my father had opened. For one year I struggled with my call into the ministry. One will never know the inner toil of such a thing until it is experienced. I was torn between what God wanted me to do, what I wanted to do, and what my daddy wanted me to do. At that time, I received very little encouragement from anyone to pursue the ministry. I was a miserable soul. I felt like a misfit. After a year (and actually more than a year) of being on the run from God, that is when I penned the date of June 6, 1967, in my Bible. I dedicated my life to do what God wanted me to do and promised nevermore to take mine eyes off my goal, which is Jesus Christ. At that time, I had no idea how much my life would change over the next year. On March 13, 1968, my home church, Friendly Avenue Baptist, licensed me into the Gospel Ministry.

I wish I could tell you that I never struggled with my call ever again. But, that is not the case. As you read further in my life's story and ministerial experiences, you will discover that a time came when God took me out behind His woodshed and gave me a licking that I'll never forget.

“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:6-12).

Chapter 4

It's Going To Be A Long Time

"It's going to be a long time before I ever get married." Those were the words that I spoke to Ann while we were dating. Now, let me back up and tell you about how we met and married.

As an older teenager, I began praying that God would pick out my wife and at His appointed time, show me who He wanted me to marry. I prayed for years and years and then just before I turned twenty-two years of age, it happened. It was also about the same time that my home church licensed me into the Gospel Ministry.

My heart's desire was to serve the Lord and I went on radio with a Sunday broadcast over WWMO in Reidsville, North Carolina. The station ran on automation and they had not perfected it at this time and my program did not always come on at the scheduled hour; therefore, I changed stations to WGPL in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. A friend of mine, whom I met while attending Fruitland, invited me to come over to Clifton Road Baptist Church in Greensboro, where he served as youth director, and record their youth choir. It just so happened that my future wife was in that choir. I made arrangements to do a recording and met the pastor, Rev. Sherman Young, who was very kind to me and eventually took me under his wing.

I liked the congregation and was invited to go with them on an outing to Tanglewood, near Winston-Salem. It was an outing for all ages over twelve or thirteen years old. Even my future mother-in-law went along. I became acquainted with a young lady by the name of Serena Ann Tolley, known to everyone as "Ann." That was in the spring of 1968. On Mother's Day of that year, I had my first "date" with Ann after church on a Sunday evening.

We went to a place called Shoney's that was located on High Point Road in Greensboro. It seems like we had a hot fudge cake to the best of my memory. Ann only lived about a mile or so from Shoney's, but she remembers me taking her home by way of High Point, North Carolina (a nearby town in the same

county). The next Saturday night we went to see “Gone With The Wind” and we’ve been gone ever since. Back in those days, when gasoline was twenty-nine and thirty-nine cents per gallon, we often would drive around. We like to laugh about one of our “dates” when we went to read epitaphs in old church cemeteries in surrounding counties.

It was about the first of June that I remember us driving around town and I can take you to the very spot in the Lindley Park area that I said, “it’s going to be a long time before I ever get married.” Have you ever had to eat your words? On July 4th we told our parents that we were going to get married. Not only that we were going to get married, but also we were planning to get married on August 25th of THAT YEAR. Ann’s mother went stone-faced and all she would say was “well!”

You can do the math for yourself, but we went together for about three months. Looking back on it, it’s downright scary, but it wasn’t so at the time. I don’t recommend short engagements, but I do recommend much prayer and letting God do the picking and choosing. I know that God gave me my wife for whom I prayed for many years. We might have dated for a short time, but we saw each other daily for most of those three months and sometimes several times a day. At that time, we both were working in downtown Greensboro. I was running my father’s shoe store and Ann was working in the office of Rhodes Furniture. We would often have lunch together and then, after work, we would spend most of our time together until it was time to go home for the evening so that we could repeat the same schedule for the next day. On Wednesday evenings, we would go to church. On Sunday’s, we spent the day together with me usually eating Sunday lunch with Ann’s family. Yes, our courtship was short in length of time; however, I had prayed for years that God would pick the wife of His choosing. We both never cease being grateful for the Lord’s mercy upon us. By the way, as a parent, I can now understand why Ann’s mother went stone-faced and all she could say was “well.”

“Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.” (Prov. 18:22)

Chapter 5

An Open Door

For many years, I prayed for God to show me what He wanted me to do with my life. As an older teen, I prayed for God to give me the wife of His choosing. After praying and waiting, within three months of each other, God gave me both a wife and full time employment in Christian ministry. The first open door of service was with the Greater Greensboro Youth for Christ. They were without an executive director, things were at a low-ebb for the organization, and they asked if I would come aboard as the club director. I was thrilled at the opportunity and in October of 1968, I turned over the keys to my father's shoe business and entered my first full time "paid" ministry.

Please notice how I have worded this. I believe that every Christian is to be in full time Christian service. Some have the opportunity of devoting their life's work and being compensated, but every Christian is to be full time for the Lord Jesus Christ. There is nothing wrong with ministerial compensation. Scripture speaks to this in the Book of First Timothy. "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the labourer is worthy of his reward" (I Tim. 5:17-18).

At the time I went with Youth for Christ, the local group had been through some difficult times. As I said, there was no executive director, and the donations had fallen off tremendously. There were times when my paycheck bounced. After going with a group of young people to a regional camp the first summer that I worked with them, there were some things that troubled me. Besides, there was not enough money coming in to pay my salary. In June of 1969, we received the good news that our first child was due the upcoming March. With that kind of news, I did not need paychecks that bounced. We had borrowed \$300 from my parents in order to purchase our first house. Ann continued to work for Rhodes Furniture until we saved enough money to pay the money back to my parents. The

reason why she quit work is because we both wanted her to be a stay-at-home mom and as soon as we were able she had planned to quit her job. She had already left her position with the furniture store when the YFC checks started to bounce.

During my tenure with Youth for Christ, the church where Ann and I were members (Clifton Road Baptist Church) asked me to serve as part time youth director. My income consisted of my part time pay from the church and full time pay from Youth for Christ. That is, when my check from YFC didn't bounce. I felt like I had no other choice, but to resign from Youth for Christ and trust the Lord to provide an income for us that would be more dependable. The part time pay from the church was not sufficient to live off of, so I started looking for a job.

I asked my daddy for a job in the store, but he told me that the only way he would give me work, was to promise that I would never consider going back into the ministry. My response to him was one that he did not want to hear. I told him that I could not make a promise like that. I kept looking for employment, but the right doors didn't open.

Ann had worked for the furniture store when we first got married. It was our goal for her to be a homemaker and she had already quit her job when we found out that she was pregnant. With us expecting our first child and only a part time income, things were beginning to get desperate.

Towards the end of August, I must confess that my faith was growing weak. Very weak! I'm not proud of what I'm about to tell you, but it grew so weak that I felt like I had to have some income. I decided that I was at the end of my rope. Being without employment is very depressing. I had gone through the weekend feeling "blue." I made up my mind that come Monday morning, I would call my daddy and tell him that I would take a job with him.

What I'm about to tell you is a beautiful picture of not only God's providence, but of His great mercy and grace upon one with a lack of faith. Early that Monday morning, before I could make that phone call to my daddy, the phone rang. It was the pastor of a local church. He told me that he had received my name from a local Bible College where I had taken some courses.

He asked if I was interested in a pastoral position in their mission. I cannot describe what came over me. Talk about a feeling of wonder, I was amazed at what God appeared to be doing in my life. My response to this pastor was most definitely in the affirmative.

From that point on, things began clicking along. Before I knew it, I was preaching in the mission and ordained into the ministry on October 22, 1969. Why would God allow me, who was so weak in faith, to ever serve Him? Why would God ever call someone like me, who could not stand on his feet and think at the same time, into the ministry? Why would God choose to save such a sinner as I? The answer to all these questions is GRACE.

Chapter 6

My Schooling

Generally speaking, I feel that most of my education has come from the school of hard knocks. I do believe that when God calls one into service that it is a call to train and prepare. That training and preparation is not necessarily the same for every person. It's generally believed that when the apostle Paul went into "Arabia" (Gal. 1:17) for a period of about three years that it was a time of God training and preparing him. Of all the apostles, we know that Paul was the most educated of them all.

Education is good, but there are different forms of education. "Book learning" is an important part of the education process, but it is not the only part. I never was a good student in school. I never liked school. I lived for the day when I could graduate and get out of school. This was one of the problems that I had with God calling me to preach the Gospel. I just could not see me spending the rest of my life studying. But, that is just what God called me to do and by His grace, I've tried to be faithful in my limited mentality.

After graduation from high school, I enrolled in one of our Baptist Colleges in North Carolina. I didn't want to attend this school, but my pastor pulled some strings in spite of my bad grades and got me accepted. As far as I'm concerned, it was just as big of a hellhole as my high school. My desire was to attend a Bible School where I could learn the Word of God. I really wasn't interested in going through the traditional ranks and getting all of my degrees. I just wanted to study God's Word. Near the end of my first semester in that college, I dropped out and enrolled in Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute in Hendersonville, North Carolina. It was and still is an excellent school. In fact, it is one of the best things supported by our North Carolina Baptist State Convention. The problem was not the school, but with me. I started struggling with my call into the ministry. After only one quarter, I did not return, but enrolled in Piedmont Bible College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. After only a few weeks, I dropped out and spent one year struggling

with my call (Previously mentioned in the chapter on A Divine Call).

The following school year, I considered going to a Bible school supported by the Baptist State Convention in Florida. I went down to look things over and was accepted for enrollment. When the day came for me to pack my bags and leave, I got in my car and drove around town. As I was driving around, God spoke to my heart loud and clear. It was not audible, but I know that he laid the words on my heart and planted them in my mind. I can even take you to the spot where He said, “go home, pick up the phone, and call John Wesley College.” I didn’t know anything about John Wesley College. All I knew was that there was a sign on High Point Road that indicated that the college was back off the road.

I had sense enough to know that if God wanted me to call, He meant for me to ask about enrollment. I went straight home, picked up the phone, and talked with the president of the college. I remember saying that I assumed it was too late to begin taking courses for the semester. He replied, “no, it’s not too late.” I went over to the school, enrolled, continued to work for my parents, and take classes for one year. I began about September of 1967 and went through May of 1968. I had spent all my life in the Baptist Church only to find out that this was an Armenian school and for the first time in my life I was exposed to a different theology. For the first time I had to study what I believed and why I believed it. I not only came out of the school a Calvinist, but I even discovered that I was a five point Calvinist.

Attending John Wesley College was a wonderful experience. The teachers were super. We could differ in love and I had a great relationship with the students as well as the teachers. I was about the only Baptist that attended at the time, but the love of Christ prevailed in our fellowship. I remember the time in my speech class that we were to give a controversial speech. I spoke on the eternal security of the born again believer. I became known as Burl the Baptist! I didn’t know it at the time, but attending this school was part of God’s plan in shaping me and molding me for ministry. As it turned out, it was a vital part in me discovering the Calvinist roots that I have today. Where did I

find them, but in an Armenian school. For the first time in my life, I examined what I believed and why I believed it. I left that school realizing that I was a Five Point Calvinist. Don't tell me that God doesn't work in strange ways!

After Ann and I were married and I took my first pastorate, I heard of Luther Rice Seminary. After inquiring about the courses, I felt that I simply couldn't afford it. My financial philosophy has always been, is, and always will be, that as much as possible to stay out of debt. I realize that there may be times when one must take the plunge to buy a house or something of that nature, but even then, don't buy what you can't pay for. Therefore, I studied on my own and tried to be a good student of the Word.

In the summer of 1982, a friend of ours who was a businessman approached me about going on a preaching crusade to South Korea. He said that he had sold a piece of equipment and didn't know anything better to do with the money than to send me to Korea to preach the Gospel. It was my joy to accept the invitation, but neither my friend nor I knew what God was going to do on that trip. On the flight over, I got acquainted with Dr. James Talbert, who founded Covenant International Evangelistic Association. At that time, he was also the pastor of Reedy Fork Baptist Church in Browns Summit, North Carolina.

The flight over the Pacific is lengthy and we had plenty of time to talk. Brother Talbert asked me about my education and I told him that I had never graduated from any school of higher learning. He asked me if I would consider doing so if my school bill was paid in full. My answer was an emphatic "YES." He said that when we returned home from the crusade that he would take care of all the arrangements with Luther Rice. To be honest with you, underneath my breath, I said to myself, "sure, I bet you will." Do you know what happened? When we returned home from South Korea, I received a phone call from Brother James informing me that everything was set at Luther Rice Seminary and that I could begin anytime I wanted. God used Brother James Talbert to be one of the biggest blessings in my life. What he did for me, he has done for countless numbers of other men. There is

bound to be a special reward in heaven for the way God has used this man.

I enrolled in Luther Rice, completed my course of study and graduated with a BA in Biblical Studies on May 9, 1986. At that time, Luther Rice Seminary was located in Jacksonville, Florida. Our graduation services were held in the auditorium of the First Baptist Church in Jacksonville. The best time to get one's education is early in life. With a wife and three children it was much harder, but God provided and saw me through to His praise and glory. There was something "special" about having my wife and children present for my graduation. Even my parents attended and gave us a trip to Disney World afterwards.

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."
(II Tim. 2:15)

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."
(II Tim. 3:14-17)

Chapter 7

The Need For Expository Preaching

I hope that you know what expository preaching is. One preacher called it suppository preaching because he believed in getting it in folks anyway that he could. I don't believe in suppository preaching, but I'm a firm believer in the expository teaching of God's holy, inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word. This means taking a passage of Scripture in context and teaching it verse by verse. Others will define it in a similar way, but this is the definition that I favor. I realize that there are some subjects that cannot be dealt with in expository fashion, but the passage under consideration must always be dealt with in context. I believe that expository preaching should be the norm in our church pulpits.

I was not always an expository preacher. In fact, I started out being topical. People may find topical messages appealing and many with catchy titles, but most have very little substance. When I began preaching, I don't even remember ever hearing an expositor. After about five years into the ministry, I learned not only what it was, but also the great need of it in our churches.

Back in those days, the charismatic movement was invading the established churches. I had taken a new pastorate when I heard that a group of people therein had stated, "now that we have a new pastor, we want our church to go charismatic." To be honest with you, at that time I had never studied charismatic theology in depth. I knew the basics in what they believed and that they highly promoted the speaking in tongues. As I was trying to get acquainted with the new church members, I visited a family one evening when I observed a stack of books in their living room dealing with the Holy Spirit and the subject of spiritual gifts, including tongues. Not knowing what was ahead of me in this new pastorate, I just knew that I had to come to terms on what God's Word had to say about this matter of tongues. Several couples in the church had been attending a tongues speaking meeting during the week and some of them claimed to have received the "gift."

One evening, I remember taking no other book except the Bible, and going into my bedroom alone. As I closed the door, I vowed not to come out until God revealed to me the teaching of His Word concerning this matter of speaking in tongues. It had invaded my new pastorate and I needed to know what God's Word taught about this subject. I was prepared to stay in my room for a long period of time, but believe it or not, I wasn't there all that long.

As I read from Acts, chapter two, and First Corinthians, chapters twelve through fourteen, God spoke to my heart and made it very clear that there is no such thing as a heavenly prayer language, gibber gabber, or ecstatic utterance given by the Holy Spirit. The gift of tongues was the supernatural ability that God gave the early church to speak in languages that had never been studied or learned.

My intention in the writing of this chapter is not to do a discourse on the subject of the charismatic movement or the subject of spiritual gifts. Soon after this revelation of truth, I did an in-depth study that verified what the Lord had shown me. I had to take a stand in my new pastorate for what I believed and I knew that it wasn't going to make me popular. It was during this time in my life that God showed me the importance of expository preaching. If you take the Bible out of context, you can make it say anything that you want it to say. Therefore, the only way to properly teach God's Word is expository verse by verse.

It was one Sunday at the close of the morning service when it all began coming to a head. One of the finest men in the church came to me during the closing hymn and said that he and his wife had been to a Saturday night meeting with the charismatic couples in the church. He told me that his wife had received the gift of tongues and that he also wanted it. With this, I knew the day of reckoning had come. I asked if I could talk with him in my study after the service to which he willingly agreed. It was at that time, I opened up God's Word and shared with him my convictions concerning the subject. He was very pleasant, did not question my position, and asked if I would come to their home that afternoon and share the same thing with his wife.

We set the time and after lunch, I made my way to their home. I had never dealt with people personally concerning the matter of tongues until I came to this pastorate. However, from what I knew about those involved, once that they had the “experience,” it was very hard to convince them that it was of the flesh. I remember sitting in the home of this wonderful couple whom I had grown to love during my short tenure in this congregation. This man had served as chairman of the pulpit committee that brought me before church. He and his wife were some of the finest people in the congregation.

As I opened God’s Word and shared with her my convictions concerning the speaking in tongues, she kept her eyes fixed on me the entire time. She was by nature such a meek, mild, and sweet spirited woman. As I was speaking, I was at the same time wondering what she was thinking. In fact, I was expecting her to unload on me when I finished. I mean, let me have it with both barrels. Instead, when I was done saying all that I had to say, she replied something like, “I’m so glad that you came to talk with me. I felt so silly the whole time that I was doing it” (referring to when she was speaking her gibber gabber).

As lovingly as I knew how, I made it clear that this new pastor was not going to lead the church in charismatic theology. I made it known that it was best for those who believed and wanted to practice such a doctrine to find a church that believed as they did. Back in those days, the charismatic movement was tearing up churches going and coming and the city in which I pastored at that time was a “hotbed” for charismatics. With the passing of time, charismatic churches were started and most of the people who wanted to practice such teachings assembled among themselves.

To be honest with you, I had a hard time dealing with charismatics for a long time (and still do to some extent). Some years later, one of my friends became a charismatic and God taught me to love the charismatic brother even though I could disagree with him. Whenever we differ with people, lost or saved, we must learn to exercise love. Never compromise truth, but without being belligerent, let people know that we love them even if we don’t love what they stand for or what they believe.

I'm thankful that God revealed to me the need of expository preaching early into my ministry. Some years later, a church that called me as their pastor told me how they were looking for an expositor. The previous pastor introduced them to expository preaching and that was the kind they wanted. Once a person is acquainted with that style of teaching, then nothing else will satisfy. I've taken pastorates that never had expository preaching prior to my coming, but after I was there for a period of time, I heard people remark that is the only kind they wanted in the future. To me personally, it's the only style of preaching that satisfies and feeds the soul.

I realize that a pastor must wear many different "hats." In other words, there are various things that are expected of a pastor. Looking back on the years that I spent in the pastorate, I don't think that I was the kind of pastor that the majority of people wanted, but I do believe that I was a biblical pastor. Most church people really don't care if a man can preach or not. As long as he will hold their hands and spiritually baby-sit them, then all is well. The last thing that most congregations want is a preacher of God's Word. To all the God-called men who read this book, I want to remind you that if God has called you to preach, then "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2). That means, it's going to require much time for study. Therefore, make sure that your priorities are in order. When it comes time to stand before the congregation that God has entrusted to you, make sure that you have been with God in His Word and preach "doctrine." Do that which God commands a pastor. Don't beat the sheep, but "Feed the flock of God which is among you" (I Pet. 5:2). If a pastor fails to do that, then he has failed to live up to his calling. Nothing, and I mean nothing, is more important for a pastor to do than to "preach the Word."

My greatest joy in the ministry is teaching/preaching God's Word. I realize there are some that make a big difference between teaching and preaching, but it's my personal belief that good preaching must contain the element of teaching. What good is it when we proclaim something, but learn nothing from it? I

remember being asked to preach one night of a revival effort for a fellow pastor. He had a different preacher each night and I was one of several that he asked. A man, who was a member of the church that I pastored, asked another gentleman who was a member of the church where I preached, “How he liked my message?” The reply was, “it was a good Sunday School lesson.” That church was not accustomed to expository preaching.

It thrills me beyond measure to see people hunger for the Word of God, regardless of how few it may be. It’s like a cook who spends much time in the kitchen preparing a good meal and enjoys seeing folk sit down to “gobble” it up. How does a cook feel when a good meal is prepared and people refuse to eat it or become picky eaters? That’s the way a preacher feels after much study and then see people within the visible church reject it. But then, I am reminded that Jesus told us, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you” (Matt. 7:6).

I love preaching and teaching the whole “counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), both Old and New Testaments. I close this chapter with a poem from an unknown author that goes something like this as it relates to both Testaments.

The New is in the Old contained;
The Old is in the New explained.
The New is in the Old concealed;
The Old is in the New revealed.

Chapter 8

Rats In The Parsonage

Down through the years, we've lived in all kinds of parsonages. Most of the churches that I pastored were small congregations and paid rather small salaries. I guess these churches thought that providing you a parsonage was part of your salary. At least the IRS thinks that it is because they require the pastor to pay a "fair rental value" in regards to his social security. Most church folk don't even know that a pastor is considered self-employed for social security purposes. This means that he must pay the same rate of social security as a business and not that of a mere employee. Actually, living in a parsonage means that the pastor had better put aside some money for his future housing need when the day comes when he no longer has a parsonage in which to live.

Most of the parsonages in which we resided were decent places to live. Some were above average. One such house was in a really nice neighborhood. It was a one-story ranch style house with a full basement where I had a large study. The lawn was huge. My wife called it the city-park and it was made clear to me when we moved in that it was my responsibility to maintain the lawn. The church bought a new John Deere riding mower for me to keep the yard looking nice. It could easily take a full day of yard work due to the size and landscape of the plot of ground. Someone was paid to do the church lawn, which was much smaller than the parsonage lawn, but it was my responsibility to buy the gasoline and do the work on the parsonage. Most of the people who lived in this neighborhood probably made three to four times what I made. In other words, that house did not fit my income, but I had to pay "fair rental value" to the IRS. I would have much rather had a housing allowance instead of the house, but after mentioning it to someone in the church, that idea didn't get off the ground. Following my departure from that pastorate and the next pastor came, guess what the church did? They sold the parsonage and gave him a housing allowance. The people

said that I kept the parsonage lawn in the best condition of any pastor that they ever had.

Actually, the wealthiest church where I served was one where I was a staff member. My salary was small and I even did the janitorial work in the church. I was also furnished a church owned house in which to live. It was in a terrible location. In fact, it was the worst location where we ever lived. Our children were small and the house was split up with bedrooms in front of the house and our bedroom in the back. It had two bathrooms, but the bathroom next to our back bedroom was in such bad condition that we kept the door closed and could not use it.

When we awoke in the mornings, it was nothing unusual to find liquor and wine bottles on our front porch, right outside of our daughter's window. We even had police officers parking outside of our back bedroom window in the church parking lot, keeping an eye on a nearby business. Our oldest son called it the raunchy house. One day shortly after moving to this house, he told his mother that he didn't like the doors, the floors, and throughout the house he went naming what he didn't like. He said that he wanted to go back to the house from which we had moved. While living in this "place", water pipes burst in a closet and damaged some of our clothing. The house was in such a bad location, that we wouldn't allow the children to go out and play. Therefore, we turned the den into a playroom for them.

It was while we lived in this location that I decided to try and find a better house for my family. Needless to say, we had very little money saved up, but I always tried to save something from my salary. We went riding around and saw what we thought was a really good deal and contacted the Realtor. I made an offer on the house and gave her the earnest money. The best that I can remember, I think it was \$500.00. The next thing that I knew, she turned out to be a crook and refused to return our money. We're not exactly sure what happened, but the best we could find out, she had a mother in a nursing home and we think that she used the money to pay her mother's bill. It just so happened that this Realtor used the same bank as did my parents and after hearing of my predicament, they were most helpful in trying to get our money. The Realtor wrote me a bad check for my \$500.00

earnest money after I applied some pressure. Her bank took pity on me and was kind enough to let me know when there was enough money in her account in order for me to cash this bad check.

After getting our money back, we were thankful that the Lord looked out for us and we didn't lose our savings. However, we were still living in what our children called "the dumpy old house." Oh, I failed to mention that the house also had mice. These were city mice, but a mouse is a mouse, I don't care from what part of the county it hails.

Speaking of mice, we once lived in a parsonage that had been previously occupied by the same pastor for about twenty-six years. You would have thought that in that period of time, he would have mouse proofed the house, but I guess some people like living with mice. Soon after we moved into this parsonage that was located in the heart of the country, we found out that it was infested with mice. We moved into this parsonage in November, shortly after the fields had been plowed and the weather was turning colder. This means that the field mice wanted to find a warm home for the winter.

I'll never forget sitting in the den one evening and what to my wondering eyes should behold, but a mouse running across the floor. I had never encountered a mouse with the lights on under such conditions. You can laugh at me if you want to, but my first thought was, "how am I going to kill this thing without getting blood on the carpet?" I grabbed a broom and went after it, but the little varmint ran and hid. The next day, I set out to mouse proof the house. I sealed every crook and cranny that I could find, even wire over the heat vents. I put out so much mouse and rat bait that I lost track of the amount. Poison was put throughout the attic and under the house. Mousetraps were used inside the house just in case some were still inside, like the one that ran across the den floor. I can still hear those traps going off at night. It was a bloody mess. Those mice didn't give up easily. I guess everyone has a mouse to get in their house at some time or another. This was not my first encounter with a mouse, but all I had done in the past was either put out some bait or set the trap and throw it away once the rodent was caught. However, these

field mice were strong and mean. I'll never forget hearing the trap snap and going off in the kitchen and then finding blood all over the floor. I caught him, but he put up a struggle.

I told the people in the church about this mouse infestation, but it didn't seem to bother them at all. Apparently, they were as use to it as the former pastor, but not this pastor! What they didn't realize is that I was a city slicker. Every year when the fall season rolled around on the calendar, I purchased a bunch of rat poison and filled the attic and crawl space of the parsonage. After that first year, we kept the mouse problem under control for as long as we lived there.

Not too long before we moved from that pastorate, we had another varmint problem. The church had some new wiring done in the house and I noticed that after the work was completed, that the back doorbell wasn't working. I called the electric company and told them about it. Very promptly, they sent some of the same crew out to check on the problem. When one of the men came down from the attic, he brought with him a snakeskin and said that it wasn't there when they had just completed their previous work. I spoke to the men in the church about checking it out because we didn't like the idea of a snake being loose in our house. I got the same response as when I told them about the mice. It was no big deal to them. So what, if you have a snake in the house? Let me say, lest you think otherwise, that these people were not a bunch of hillbillies. In fact, this church had the most educated people of any pastorate that I ever served. It paid me the best salary of any of my pastorates. They made good salaries and they felt like the pastor ought to be paid a decent salary. For that I am most grateful, but I've said all of that to say that the things, which bothers some folks doesn't bother others. For my wife and me, it bothered us to think there might be a snake loose in our house.

I took it upon myself to call the Critter Control man to check out the parsonage and paid for it out of my own pocket. To be honest with you, when he arrived, he looked like one of the critters. He checked out the parsonage, sealed up whatever areas where he felt like the snake was most likely to enter and assured us that the snake was no longer in or under the house. He asked

for a raw egg and then baited a trap in the attic just in case, the snake showed up again. Shortly thereafter, we moved from that parsonage and left the egg trap in the attic. I've often wondered what ever happened to that egg. In that part of the country it could really get hot in the summertime.

Speaking of varmints, you've never seen a rat until you've seen a wharf rat. This one parsonage where we lived was a decent house from all visual appearance. But, what was lurching behind the walls was something for a Hollywood horror movie. We thought everything was fine about the house until the weather turned cold and we started to hear noises in the walls and in the attic. I had heard mice scrambling in the walls from other parsonages. But, this sounded like a bear trying to break out of its cage. It was so loud it would even wake us up at night. I knew that if it was a mouse, it had to be a big one. This time the church did respond and called a pest control company that came and put out rat bait. It didn't take long before the bait went to work. As I was walking around the house one afternoon, I found a dead wharf rat lying on the ground. Never before had I seen anything like it. It seemed to be close to twelve inches long to the best of my memory.

I wish I could tell you that ended our rat problems, but it didn't. Come to find out, some years prior to this, the county landfill had been a few miles from this site and we could only assume that is where these rats multiplied. We never found out how they got into the house. We'll never know how many rats took up residence in this parsonage, but this one thing I can tell you, "not all the rats got out."

If you think it "stinks" when a mouse dies in your walls, just imagine what it smells like when wharf rats die in the walls. We had been out of town to visit our parents, when we arrived back at the parsonage and we were greeted with an odor that would take your breath away. Our task was to try and figure out a way to live in the house until the odor subsided. We called a pest control company and asked for suggestions. We tried everything we knew, wintergreen and you name it, but the very best we could do wasn't good enough. It was cold outside and we couldn't leave the windows open all the time. We had to deal

with it the best we could, just like all the other problems in life. Waiting for the smell to subside was a good lesson in learning “patience” (Rom . 5:3) and that “this too shall pass.”

It just so happened that this was the parsonage where our source of water was a well, the parsonage well. I had to pay my utility bill including electricity to run the well. Oh, let me tell you how many people used that one well. Besides my family in the parsonage, the church used it, the house to the right of the parsonage used it, and the house to the left of the parsonage used it. But, the church expected me to pay for it. Whenever we had a baptismal service and filled up the pool, that pump seemed to run forever.

This is also the same parsonage that was about twenty miles (the way the crow flies) from a paper mill. Before our encounter with the rats in the winter, we had an encounter with the paper mill smell in the summer. I’m sure that many of you have driven through or near a paper mill community and are aware of the odor involved. I don’t know the words to describe it, but it resembles the smell of rotten eggs. I guess people who live in those communities get use to it. Without realizing how far that odor could travel, the smell was so strong that it would literally wake us up at night while trying to sleep. Needless to say, that was a stinking place to live. Unfortunately, it turned out to stink in more ways than one. The spiritual stink in the church (see chapter on The Firing Of A Pastor) was worse than the rats or the paper mill.

During my pastoral career, not only did we have to contend with rats in the parsonage, but also we once lived in a parsonage with a large lake in the front yard. Our children were small and we had to fence in our double car carport for their play area. We didn’t want them running down to the lake or getting attacked by the hogs! Sometimes, folk in the church would come over and go fishing. That was fine, but what wasn’t fine is the fact of a nearby farmer who had some hogs that would get out and come over to root up our yard. It looked like someone had taken a tractor and plowed the premises. In another parsonage, we came home one day to find horses in our yard. Fortunately, no damage was done and we were able to locate the owners. I guess

preachers draw all kinds! I remember one preacher saying that; “bright lights draw bugs.”

When I accepted the call to this one church and moved into their parsonage we noticed that the house was located in a curve of the road. We were informed that it was one of the worst curves in the entire county and that it was nothing unusual for cars to take the curve too fast resulting in bad accidents. In fact, we were advised never to park any car to the front or side of the house for that very reason. Not too long before we moved into this house, a vehicle had taken the curve too fast, left the road, and hit the front steps of the parsonage, knocking them loose. In the years that we lived in this house, we could not keep count as to the number of times we called 911 due to accidents taking place on this curve. Most of the accidents occurred during the night. It was nothing for us to be awakened; hearing the screeching of breaks that was usually followed with a bang of some sort or else the tumbling over of the vehicle. After moving from this parsonage, we were told about a vehicle that ran off the road and literally knocked the house loose from its foundation. While we lived there, we found it rather difficult to get a good night’s sleep for more reasons than one. However, after what we were told when we moved into this parsonage, we selected bedrooms that were in the back of the house. Even at that, a car once ran off the road and hit the telephone pole near our bedroom window. That was about 2 AM in the morning. What a place to live!

Before concluding the telling of our parsonage experiences, I’d like to tell you about a parsonage that we didn’t live in. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen the movie called, “Angel in My Pocket,” that stars Andy Griffith. I highly recommend it to anyone, especially to pastors. In this movie, Andy Griffith plays the part of a pastor who moves his family into a parsonage that is in need of repairs. It reminds me of a church in Florida that had built a new church facility. Across the street from the church building was their parsonage. It had been an old school building with extremely large rooms and very high ceilings. It was in bad condition, even worse than the parsonage in the movie. The roof of the front porch on the parsonage was about to fall down. It wasn’t even safe to use that entrance. Can you believe that a

church would build a new building and then offer the man of God a dump in which to live? I didn't consider the taking of this church for reasons that were even more serious than the parsonage. There were charismatic issues and moral issues that turned me off. I had already dealt with those two problems in another church and didn't want to do so again. I mention this particular parsonage because it simply tells you something about a church's priorities and the value they place or do not place on taking care of God's man.

If possible, it's generally best for a church to provide a housing allowance for their pastor. I realize there are some cases when that is impossible and in some cases where it's not the best option depending upon circumstances. It is comforting to know that if something happened to the pastor, then his family would have someplace to live if they owned their own house. Besides, most churches don't think twice if they want to get rid of a pastor and throw him out of the parsonage. I know what it's like for a church to put you, your wife, and three little children out on the street with nowhere to go. When that happened to me, my God proved faithful. That story will be covered in another chapter. We are grateful to the Lord for providing us a housing allowance in my last pastorate and for the way God has taken care of us with a roof over our heads.

Chapter 9

A Stink In The Church

If you think that the smell of a dead rodent is bad, it doesn't begin to compare with the stink that a troublemaker can stir up in the church. It's been asked, "How many briars does it take under a horse's saddle to make him buck?" The answer is, "ONLY ONE." I learned very early into my first pastorate there were people in the church who enjoyed making life miserable for everyone, including the pastor. It was a mission church that was supported by a "mother church." The sponsoring church was well known and "highly respected" in both the city and state where it was located.

What most people on the outside didn't know is that this "mother church" was not very mission-minded about its mission. When I became pastor of the mission, I was told by one of the members of the "mother church" that I should never talk with the senior pastor without a witness. Before I left my position as mission pastor, I found that to be true. It's a sad day in Christendom when you cannot confide in a pastor! That first church was a very hard beginning. Most of the people in the congregation were extremely understanding of me being a young greenhorn and I appreciate their kindness and support. I loved the flock that God had entrusted to my care and I stood up for them, even to the "mother church."

There was this one occasion when the "mother church" had just completed a new edition to their building (it was a growing church that was numbers hungry in our city). We were informed at the mission that some new furniture was going to be purchased for the new building and if we needed any tables then we could place our order at the same time. I need to tell you that the mission was totally self-supporting. The "mother church" did nothing except supervise our activities and use us to increase their figures and make them look good. The "mother church" refused to cut the apron strings and let the mission be an established church on its own. It seems like we were running

close to a hundred in attendance and financially on our own, paying all of our bills.

We did place an order for some “new tables” and finally the day came when I received a call from the “mother church” for us to come and get our tables. When I arrived, the “mother church” told us to take the old used tables that were being replaced. We had already paid for “new tables” and told them that we were not going to settle for their old ones, so I took the new tables. That is why I said that the “mother church” was not very mission-minded about their mission.

Another problem was that the senior pastor had no trouble unloading his troublemakers in the “mother church” on me in the mission church. There was this one lady who lived up to her reputation of being a “red head” (no disrespect to people with red hair). She was a spitfire to say the least and thrived on making life miserable for this young preacher boy. I talked with the senior pastor about it and I remember him saying to me, “if you can pastor that church, then you can pastor any church.”

As a young inexperienced preacher boy, I didn’t know how to pastor a church, much less how to handle troublemakers. But, thanks be to God, the Lord gave me a man from the “mother church” who was our mission coordinator. I’ll never forget one Sunday when this woman (I’ll not call her a lady because that she was not) went on the warpath. She was in charge of the nursery and the nursery was located in a house next to the church building. I’ll never forget how our mission coordinator told me to just go with him over to the nursery house and let him do the talking. I already had my share of confrontation with the old battle-ax, and now it was his turn. I don’t recall what the issue was on this occasion, but he lowered the boom on her and told her off. Needless to say, that didn’t shut her up. Those kinds of people never do learn! They just keep on doing what they do best which is stirring up a stink. The only thing that ever changes them is death.

After a few years I had all that I could take of her and her cronies. I approached the senior pastor and asked him to do something about the matter. I’m sure that I did not handle matters as well as I could or should have, but blame it on inexperience, I

just felt like I couldn't take any more. All of our mission coordinators were good men who supported me, but the last one left and went into the ministry. I just told the senior pastor that if something was not done then I was going to leave and I felt like most of the good folk in the church were fed up and would also probably leave. That's when I found out that he was the type of person who was only interested in saving his own hide. To put it simply, the senior pastor shot me a curve, and I ended up leaving the church. Sure enough, most of the mission congregation left and I didn't know better than to try and start a church from scratch. Many of the people were fed up with how the "mother church" had treated us and not only did they leave but also most of the folk came to the church that I started. At that time, I wanted to be another Jerry Falwell. However, God taught me that I wasn't Jerry Falwell. God made me who I am and I couldn't be something that I'm not.

Shortly after that move, I received a phone call early one morning from a lady who was still in the former mission church. With much excitement and almost stuttering, she asked me if I had heard what just happened to the woman who was the number one troublemaker in my first pastorate, the "red head." I told her that I knew nothing and then she exclaimed, "She's dead preacher, she's dead." The caller went on to tell me that this woman died very suddenly the night before from a cerebral hemorrhage. And then, I can still hear the caller's words saying to me, "Preacher, I just want you to know that I never said or did anything against you." It was like she was saying, God took this woman's life because she was a notorious church troublemaker and this caller wanted to clear her conscience lest she fall victim of such an untimely death.

Only God knows why this middle aged woman died in the prime of her life, leaving behind a meek mild mannered husband with a young son. Only the Lord knows where her soul would spend eternity. All I can tell you is what happened and it wasn't the last time that I would hear or experience such things in the years that would follow.

I'll be the first to admit that I made plenty of mistakes in my first pastorate. I'll take my share of the blame for the way I

mishandled the leaving of that church. Not only in my first pastorate did I make mistakes, but also in every one that I ever had. I was no perfect pastor, but this one thing I did, I tried to look out for the sheep of God. I saw my duty as the under-shepherd of God's people. There are hirelings in pulpits and wolves in congregations, but I always took my calling as a pastor very seriously. I fought for the sheep. I defended the sheep. I loved the sheep. I fed the sheep. I cared for the sheep. Maybe, I didn't do it the way some wanted me to, but I tried the best I knew how and I tried to please the Lord in the way I did it. I'm sure that I failed in more ways than I know, but I had the best interest of the sheep at heart, even when I blew it.

After many years into pastoring, I must admit that I became weary of dealing with church troublemakers. Trouble in the church is like manure. The more you stir it, the more it stinks. Troublemakers love to stir up a stink. God's people are admonished, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5:9). I hadn't been in one pastorate very long when a family tried to create a stink. They were trying to divide the church over a personal family matter. Remember that I had been at this business of pastoring for some time and to be honest, my tolerance level of putting up with church stinkers was getting rather shallow. On this occasion, I remember meeting with the deacons and telling them, "if you want to stand with me and support me, then we'll clean this mess up, but if you're not going to stand behind me, then I'm not going to get my nose blooded for you."

Before going to this church, I had been stomped on, stepped on, and spit on (all figuratively speaking). To be honest, I was sick and tired of standing without the backing and support of the church leadership. In this case, I'm glad to report that the deacons responded to what I told them by saying, "this family has done nothing but cause problems for years, and we think it's time to do something about it." They did stand with me and we were privileged to see this choir director, her husband, daughter, and granddaughter leave the church. My, what a blessing it was to see them leave! That congregation proved to be one that stood

by me and supported me like I hadn't experienced since my first pastorate.

I pastored one church that only had an annual business meeting. That may sound good, but it was held on a Sunday morning during the main worship service. The people came gunning for the pastor and you could expect all hell to break loose. It was a church made up of families where everybody was related. The men in the church would do battle to see who could become a deacon. I held very high standards for those in that capacity, which made some men very angry with me for not allowing them to serve. To begin with, most Baptist churches do not understand the biblical concept of deacons. They see it as a board of authority rather than a place of spiritual service.

I remember the time when one old codger, who wanted to be an ordained deacon got so angry with me for not letting him serve, that he came to the parsonage one Sunday afternoon. After ranting and raving in front of our children for several hours, we finally got rid of him. My wife still remembers how he gave a final demonstration of his depravity upon leaving our home. He vented his vindictive spirit by stopping at the outside electrical box and pulling the switch that killed the power to the parsonage. Later, we discovered that this same married man had the "hots" for another married woman in the church.

Many times, I've said that there is so much of the world in the church that you can hardly tell that the church is in the world. Do you want to know why preacher's kids often grow up and don't want anything to do with the church? This guy is just one of the reasons. I just kept reminding our children to keep their eyes on Jesus. Don't look at people, not even people in the organized church, because they will disappoint you. Look to Jesus! People can be a stench to the nostrils of God, but Jesus is the sweet smelling savor.

I'll never forget the woman who tried to stir up a stink at various times throughout my tenure in one pastorate. She would have caused more problems than what she did, but was unsuccessful at creating a large following. Not too long after my arrival, she "got it in" for a man who served as a greeter. For some reason, be it the manner in which he greeted the people or

whatever, she didn't like him and decided to let him know it. Her words were so offensive to him that he chose to resign and not come back to church rather than risk causing problems for me. This gentleman was one of our older members, but he would do anything in the church when asked. He was a real asset to the congregation whereas the offensive woman was a liability. When I became aware of the situation, the chairman of the deacons went with me to talk with this woman whose husband was also present at the time of our visit. We tried to rectify the situation, but this one thing I learned during that visit. The husband upheld his wife in her wrongdoing. How many times did I discover that in my ministry? More than I can remember. To me, right is right and wrong is wrong, regardless of who does it! Don't ever support people, even family members, in their sin. From that point on while I served that pastorate, she tried to operate her tongue wagging campaign against me in the "background," but by God's grace; I stood on the Word of God, never backed down, and survived.

There was once this widower who liked to visit the shut-ins. Everywhere he went, he told people how "bad" things were in the church. In one of his visits, he made a degrading comment about another lady in the church. This lady just so happened to be one of our good friends and strong supporters. She was a fine Christian lady who wanted to deal with this matter properly. Therefore, she asked that my wife and I be present at the time she confronted this man about what he had said concerning her. After she "called his hand" and put him "in his place," she also said that she wanted to know what was so "bad" in the church. In our opinion, we all thought that things were going the best ever since my coming to that pastorate. Since he was telling everyone how "bad" things were, she just wanted to know what was so "bad." He replied, "I don't know, but it sure is bad." Church stinkers come in all sizes, shapes, ages, and genders.

Chapter 10

A Pastor Or A Preacher

I've talked with more pastor search committees down through the years than I can remember. They have asked all kinds of questions, some of which have absolutely nothing to do with preaching or pastoring a church.

There was this one church that asked me "what we ate." That's right, you heard me correctly. They wanted to know what we ate. I told them that I like corn bread and greens like everybody else. I really don't know what that had to do with being their pastor.

I think it was this same committee that wanted to know about my wife's involvement in the church. Most churches will inquire about the pastor's wife and there is a place for appropriate questions. But, one thing that I would not permit a committee to do, and that was to interrogate my wife, putting her on the hot seat. A church that will do that is not worth having.

Another church wanted to know how many times that I had been married. I told the man who asked the question that Ann was my one and only wife. His response was, "well, I've asked the hard question, you all can ask the others" (referring to the remaining members of the committee asking any other question they wanted answered). To him, the only important question was the marriage question. I found that attitude so very common among pastor search committees (previously known as pulpit committees). Most churches are programmed to think that marriage failure means that a person is washed up and should be put on a shelf for God. That is another subject I deal with in my book on *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*. I found it sad, strange, and stupid that a church would allow a man to serve as chairman of the pastor search committee, but not allow him to serve as a deacon. This just goes to show how ignorant most churches are in their understanding of Holy Scripture. It's the same thing as allowing a divorced man to be a Sunday School teacher, but refusing to let him be a deacon. The Baptist Church is all messed up with their understanding in what it means to be a

deacon. I've already written a booklet on the Biblical role of a New Testament Deacon and plan to publish it into a book. The title is *Godly Servants, A Glimpse into the Subject of Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses*.

Most churches, with which I talked as a prospective candidate for pastor, would not allow a divorced man to serve as a deacon, but would allow him to serve on anything and everything else in the church. However, there was one church that I'll never forget. They were a real self-righteous bunch and as spiritual as a bunch of bed bugs. With great pride they boasted that no divorced person could serve as a deacon or hold any other office in their church. It was very clear that sinners were not allowed in their congregation.

On two different occasions, I talked with pulpit committees that startled me with what they asked and said. This one committee asked if Ann and I fought. Literally, fought! We both replied, that, "NO," we did not fight. Then, they went on to explain why they asked their question. They said that the previous pastor and his wife would come to church services with bruises where they had been in a fight with each other. Another church, while showing us their parsonage, informed us that their former pastor and wife threw things at each other. Ann and I wondered what kind of church would drive a couple to take out their frustrations in such a way. We went to neither of those churches.

I'll never forget the pulpit committee that came and spent the entire day with me. They arrived for the morning worship service. After the service they wanted us to go out and eat lunch. I wasn't feeling well at all. I had been sick with a cold or flu like illness, but I put forth an effort to entertain them. When we arrived at the restaurant, they never offered to pay for our meal. That sent up a red flag. After the meal, we went back to my study at the church and spent the rest of the afternoon until time for the evening service. During our time with the committee, I got some bad vibrations. I did something I'd never done before or since. I asked the committee to give me a personal salvation testimony and proceeded to start with the chairman. He was a well-educated man, but when I asked him to speak, he said that he was

going to have to think about it for awhile and for me to come back to him. I went around the room and each committee member spoke, but when I got back to the chairman, he simply said that something happened to him during his college days. He gave no indication of knowing anything about the new birth and there he was serving as chairman of the pastor search committee. I'm thankful that I didn't go to that church because all they've ever had since is trouble.

Speaking of trouble, there was another committee that really did me dirty. In fact, in the flesh I wanted to go to this church, but the Lord was looking out for me and did not permit it. The church left me hanging after talking with me, leading me on, and making me think they were interested. I didn't know what was going on and wasn't able to put the puzzle together until after everything was over and they had called another pastor. Through a friend of mine, I found out they were dealing with several men at one time. A pastor search committee should never do that. They left me on the back burner just in case the man that they issued the call too turned them down. All I can do is praise the Lord for not allowing me to get stuck with that bunch. Following my encounter with them, they were never able to keep a pastor very long. Today, that church no longer exists, but the facilities have been taken over by another congregation.

Most pastor search committees that I dealt with really didn't know what they were doing. Ignorance of the Word of God was profound much to their shame. There was a committee that called and asked us to meet with them at their church. They had not heard me preach and I don't believe they had even listened to one of my messages on tape. All they had was my resume and they wanted to get acquainted with me and my wife.

We set a time, arrived at the church, and met the committee members. They told me that after our discussion they would give me a tour of the building. The chairs were arranged in sort of a semicircle. To this day, I'm not really sure who the chairperson was of the committee. I suspicion that it was a lady by what I'm getting ready to tell you. We spent most of our time talking about the general type of stuff that committees talk about, but I'm sure they gathered from what I had to say that my emphasis was on

the teaching of God's Word. Near the end of our meeting, a woman sitting near me, looked me in the face, and blurted out, "we don't need a preacher and we don't need a teacher, we can all go home and study the Bible for ourselves!"

To be honest with you, that stirred my righteousness indignation, but I held my cool. I looked her squarely between the eyes and held up three fingers. Trying to explain to her the role of a pastor, I told her that there were three Greek words used in the New Testament that referred to the same office. First, there is the word episkope, which speaks of the "office of a bishop" (I Tim. 3:1). The word episkopos is translated "bishop" (I Tim. 3:2) and means overseer emphasizing the function of the office as one being in charge of the spiritual supervision of God's sheep. Secondly, I told her that the word presbuteros is "elder" (I Jh. 1:1) referring to the spiritual maturity of the one who holds the office. Thirdly, I explained that poimen is "pastor" (Eph. 4:11) and it points to the work that the "elder" is to do in his "office of bishop." He is to teach (Eph. 4:11) God's people God's Word!

Very quickly thereafter, our meeting came to a close. I was asked if I wanted to see the church facilities to which I replied, "that will not be necessary." My wife and I got in the car and left never to hear from them again.

There was this one pulpit committee that had me preach both morning and evening services. After the evening service, they stood me in the pulpit and fired questions at me like a presidential press conference. Everyone in the church could take their turn and have a shot. Once again, there's nothing wrong with asking questions, but the attitude with which the questions are asked will tell you a great deal about the people. I never returned to that church.

Another pulpit committee that I talked with didn't impress me whatsoever. In fact, I asked what they wanted in a pastor and I got all sorts of dumb answers. One guy spoke up and said that he wanted a friend, a pal, and a buddy. The chairman of the committee was a licensed minister and said that he didn't care if a man could preach or not, it didn't make any difference to him. When Ann and I got in the car to come home, the first words to

come out of my mouth were, “I’m not going to that church.” Well, have you ever had to eat your words?

To make a long story short, I didn’t want to take that church. I had just completed a series of messages from the Book of Jonah and I believe that series was for me. I didn’t want to be like Jonah, so when that church actually issued a call for me to serve as their pastor, I knew that I had to accept it. After I was there for about two years, the man who served as chairman of the committee when I took that pastorate, told me that he had learned more Bible in the two years that I’d been there than over the twenty plus years that their former pastor was there. Another gentleman, who became a good friend and still is to this day, told me the same thing. I was privileged to see more people profess faith in Jesus Christ and baptized in that pastorate than any that I ever served.

As I close this chapter on what pastors are called to do, allow me to share a story about the little boy who was waiting for his mother to come out of the grocery store. As he waited, he was approached by a man who asked, “Son, can you tell me where the Post Office is?” The little boy replied, “Sure! Just go straight down this street a couple of blocks and turn to your right.” The man thanked the boy kindly and said, “I’m the new pastor in town. I’d like you to come to church this Sunday and I’ll show you how to get to Heaven.” The little boy replied with a chuckle, “Oh, come on now. You don’t even know the way to the Post Office.”

I’m afraid that we’re living in a day when many pulpits are filled with men who don’t know how to get to heaven. As a result, they certainly cannot tell others that “Jesus” is the only “way” (Jh. 14:6).

Chapter 11

The Ugliest Woman

One morning while sitting at the desk in my study, I received a phone call from one of our church members who worked in the county courthouse. She told me that I needed to know what happened the previous night before it hit the local newspaper. One of our church members was arrested for indecent exposure. It was a man. That man was an active deacon (the best that I can recall, he was serving as deacon chairman at the time). He was a licensed minister who could bring a message better than many pastors that I've heard. He also taught one of the largest Sunday School classes in the church and served as chairman of the pastor search committee when I was called as pastor of this church.

With all of that being said, allow me to back up to the previous evening. I'm a firm believer in God's providence and I have no doubt that God was preparing me for the phone call that I received. Like I said, this man whom I have just mentioned held some vital positions in the church. I noticed that for several services he had not been attending and we had not heard from him. With that being the case, I asked one of the deacons to go with me to visit him. Without knowing that we were coming, we went to the man's house, knocked on the door, and were invited in. This deacon was not married, but I tried to be observant as I gazed around his living room. I saw several wig catalogs on the coffee table and the door to a bedroom was closed. I also observed a lady's handbag on the floor. My imagination started to run wild. I wondered if he had a woman hiding in the bedroom behind the closed doors. However, I tried to give him the benefit of the doubt, knowing that he had a sister and perhaps she had left her handbag at his house.

We chatted with the man for a while and let him know that his presence had been missed at church. I remember him telling us that he had recently taken a trip to the mountains. We eventually left having no indication that someone else was in the house. I, along with the other deacon who went with me, was perplexed, with a lot of questions, but no real answers. Little did

I know that the answers were going to start being revealed in less than twelve hours.

Now, back to the phone call. Not only was I informed of the charges against him, but also that it was his next door neighbor who called the police and filed the charges. It just so happened that I knew the neighbor since she worked at the store where we bought groceries. I located her number in the phone book and gave her a call. She told me all about the episode and with her having a little child, she did not want that type thing going on in her community. Sometime after my fellow deacon and myself left his house, and after it started getting dark (all of this happened during daylight savings time), this man walked out on his front porch wearing not much more than a woman's bra and a lady's wig.

After getting all the details, I notified our deacons. We agreed that we would meet and go together and confront this man as soon as possible after he got off work. Standing together at his front door, we knocked not knowing if he would even answer the door. After some time, he did come to the door and we informed him that we heard the charges against him. We asked him to turn over his ministerial license, resign from teaching his Sunday School class, and step down from his position as a deacon until the charges could be settled in a court of law. He went back inside the house and returned with his ministerial license. We were never invited in the house and the man never had much to say. He was cooperative, but quiet.

He never came back to church after this, but I tried to stay in touch hoping to see him get right with God. Whenever his court date came up on the calendar, I was present and heard everything that was said concerning his case. The best that I can remember, he pleaded "no contest."

I never dreamed when I entered the ministry that I would have to deal with a cross-dresser in the church, much less a cross-dressing deacon who was also a licensed minister. Later, we found out that this man would apparently dress up like a woman and go out of town to buy his alcohol. We also came to the conclusion that he made his mountain trip to buy wigs. After this sordid story got out to the congregation, a couple in the

church told me about something the husband observed in one of his trips to the grocery store. Before any of us knew anything about our transvestite church deacon, this husband went to the grocery store on an errand for his wife. When he came home, he remarked to his wife that he saw the ugliest woman that he had ever seen and it looked just like -----! Well, guess what? It was ----- who turned out to be the cross-dressing deacon.

Chapter 12

Mean To The Bone

Have you ever heard it said that there is nothing like a “mean woman?” The writer of Proverbs reminds us of what it’s like dealing with such a woman when he says, “It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house” (Prov. 21:9, 25:24). There is no doubt that the writer of Proverbs is Solomon (Prov. 1:1) and if you know anything about Solomon, you are aware of the fact that he knew something about women (I Kings 11:3). Two times in the Book of Proverbs, he makes the same identical statement about dealing with a “brawling woman.”

I’ve known some mean women in my time and most of them have been in the institutionalized church. The woman that I’m going to tell you about could pray one of the prettiest prayers that you’ve ever heard. She had a way with words, but she was one of the meanest women that I’ve ever had the misfortune of knowing.

Back in the days when I crossed paths with this woman, there was no such thing as caller ID. I wish that it had been invented because I sure could have used it. She would call our house all hours of the DAY AND NIGHT for the simple reason of being mean. She took great delight in calling during the middle of the night and waking us up. When she called, she never would say anything. She would just let the phone ring until we answered it and then she would lay her phone aside and keep our phone out of commission for hours. This not only meant that she would wake us up at night, but also not allow us to make or receive calls when she did her dastardly deed.

I was suspicious of her being the culprit simply because of her demonic personality. The thing that also alerted us to her was the fact that her brother-in-law told us that she had done a similar thing to her own daughter. When she made one of her calls to the parsonage, I drove to the church and used the phone to call her house to see if I got a busy signal. Sure enough, it was busy. That made me even more suspicious that she was THE ONE.

After calling the Phone Company and inquiring what I could do about these annoying calls, I was informed that I had to go through the sheriff's department. Everything was done according to the letter of the law in order to trace her call. All we had to do was wait for the next phone call from this "mean church member." It came as expected and we did as we were instructed. The next thing I knew there were sheriff's deputies in our kitchen. One got on our phone and another drove to the house where Mrs. Mean Woman lived. The Phone Company verified that she was the witch. You must remember that she would call and leave her phone receiver off the hook so that we could not use our phone. The deputy that walked in her house picked up her phone that she had left off the hook and talked to the deputy in our house. The line was still open. She was caught red handed. What do you think she did? She blamed it on her granddaughter.

I'll never forget one of the deputies who remained in the parsonage asking us how old was this person who made the calls. When we told him that she was probably in her sixties, he couldn't believe that someone of that age could do such a childish thing. What he didn't realize is that meanness knows no age limit. In fact, many of the people who have made life most miserable in my pastorates have been the elderly. That is a shame and poor example for their children. I personally think that these folk need to be saved. All people who act in such a fashion simply expose their true nature. If they behave like the devil then it's because they are the children of the devil.

The authorities asked if I wanted to press charges against Mrs. Mean Woman. I told them that I did not want to press charges. All that I wanted was for her to stop the annoying calls to the parsonage. The best that I can remember, it seems like she tried it one more time, but did not keep the phone off the hook. She continued to attend church services every Sunday.

After the news of this got out to the congregation, I started to hear more tales about this poor old soul. I was told that she was known to carry a gun in her handbag. Some people thought that she might go on a shooting spree any given Sunday. Our chairman of the deacons told me that during our Sunday morning prayer time, he would often not bow his head, but kept his eyes

open and fixed upon her, just in case she ever tried something at an inopportune time.

This same “mean woman” also tried to tell people that I refused a collect phone call from her sister who was institutionalized out of town. This phone call came while I was away, but my wife took the call. When the phone rang, the operator asked Ann if she would accept the charges from this sister. Ann recognized the name and said that she would accept the phone charges for this collect call. Like I said, the sister was in an institution in another part of the state. As soon as Ann responded in the affirmative and the operator turned the call over to the caller, the caller hung up. The next thing that we knew is that Mrs. Mean Woman was telling everybody what a sorry pastor I was because we refused to accept the phone charges from her sick sister. She was a “liar” because she was of her “father ... the devil” (Jh. 8:44) and we not only caught her in her lies, but proved her a liar.

When our phone bill arrived in the mail, it showed that we accepted the collect phone call. However, the collect phone call was NOT made from the place where the sister was institutionalized. It was made from the second home that Mrs. Mean Woman and her husband had elsewhere in the state. Her husband ran a business and he would spend the weekdays in their second home and the weekends in their home near the church at which time they would attend services. Sometimes, the wife would accompany her husband to their second home and sometimes she would stay on her local turf. Personally, I wish they had moved clean out of state, but those kinds just stick around to worry the life out of you. It was on one of her trips with her husband that she placed this collect call to our parsonage. I took the bill to the church and proved her wrong. It was a family church and everybody there was kin except for my family and one or two other families at the time. Nobody was really interested in me proving my case or standing up for myself. One man who was related to Mrs. Mean Woman threw the phone bill back in my face when I showed it. Christians should never defend wrongdoers for in so doing they become enablers. Love sinners, but don't make excuses for their sin.

Chapter 13

The Firing Of A Pastor

For many years, the Southern Baptist Convention has reported on the problem of what they refer to as, “forced terminations” of pastors by churches within the denomination. I would even say that at times, it has reached epidemic proportions. We all know that the phrase, “forced termination,” is just another way of saying that the pastor got fired. The figures that the SBC reports are only those that they know about as compiled by state convention agencies. I dare say that those figures are on the low side because the vast majority they never know about.

Back in October of 1998, the SBC reported in “Facts & Trends” that an average of 74 pastors and 25 other staff members were terminated EACH MONTH in 1996, for a total of 99 PER MONTH. This makes an average total of some 1,188 church firings for the entire year of 1996. It was also reported in the same publication that this figure was down from 1997 when the total number of forced terminations was estimated at 125 PER MONTH. Those figures total out to be 1,500 church firings for 1997. Once again, I remind you that these are only the ones that the convention knows about. Only God knows how many were left unnumbered by the SBC. Various reasons were given as to why church staff members, and pastors in particular, got fired. Some of the most common reasons (?) for firing were conflict over control, a pastor’s poor people skills, a church’s resistance to change, leadership was too strong, and the church was already in conflict to begin with. I could go on and on as to why a church would want to fire a pastor.

I’ve heard it said that there are two kinds of pastor’s, the one who has been fired and the one who is going to be fired. Someone else has remarked that a pastor is not worth his salt, until he has been fired. We are living in a day when many churches simply will not endure sound doctrine and will not tolerate a pastor who declares God’s Word. Back in my early days of pastoring, I went to preach for a church in view of a call.

The church voted on me the following Sunday and I was voted down. But, the pulpit committee, as it was called back in those days, told me that the attendance was off and they wanted to vote again the next Sunday. I was young and didn't know any better, so I said, "OK."

The following Sunday the church voted again and I was voted down the second time. When the pulpit committee called and let me know the outcome, I was curious as to the problem. When I asked, I was told that when I preached my "trial" sermon for them, I mentioned the subject of Hell in my message and they said that they didn't want Hell preached in their church. If they had told me that to begin with, then I could have saved them some time and trouble.

I'll be the first one to tell you that pastors are not perfect. We are not infallible, but as a God called servant, our job is to preach the infallible Word of God. I have observed that those pastors who do not major on the expository proclamation of Holy Scripture seem to come nearer avoiding getting fired or run off. God does not call pastors to be the CEO or program pusher of the church. A God called pastor is to "preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:2-4).

There has never been any such thing as a perfect pastor. We all have our flaws and imperfections by the bushel. I can only compare what I'm getting ready to tell you to my very first pastorate. I was green as grass and had no idea in the world what I was doing. My, did I make my mistakes and pull some real boners. But, you know what? Most of the people accepted me anyway. I was their pastor. I was their spiritual leader. They knew that I was young. They knew that I was full of faults, but they cut me some slack. They loved me anyway and for that reason, after all these years there is still a bond that binds us together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

That leads me to say wherein I believe one of the biggest problems lies in this business of firing preachers. In fact, I think it's one of the biggest problems that we have in many if not most churches of today and that is the problem of an unregenerate membership. Scripture commands those of us in the household of faith to "love one another" (Jh. 13:34, 15:12,17, I Jh. 4:7, 11-12).

A friend of mine confessed to me that he always thought that a pastor had to do something really bad to get fired, until he got the ax and then he discovered otherwise. When ungodly people get it in for a pastor, they'll stop at nothing. That is when God's people within a congregation need to exercise some guts. I don't know why it is that Satan's crowd has more brass than God's people do. I know that we are "sheep" (Jh. 10:26-27) and are to be meek and mild. But, we also need spiritual strength to stand in the "power" of the "Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:8). Believers are not to act like a bunch of spiritual weaklings and let the devil defeat our Christian testimonies. "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (I Jh. 4:4); therefore we need to act like spiritual warriors who are clothed in the "whole armour of God" (Eph. 6:11-18). The Lord never expects believers to be the world's doormat.

Many years ago, while serving in a church staff position, I received a call from another church to come as their pastor. Those were the days when the battle for the Bible was just beginning to heat up in the Southern Baptist Convention. I had always been an outspoken critic of the liberalism that had a stranglehold at that time on the SBC. There were some associational missionaries (often known today as directors of missions) who tried to keep a tight hold on their group of churches. The men, with whom I held company, better knew such men as assassinational mercenaries. Back in those days, if I, as a Southern Baptist, did something in the church that was not endorsed by the convention, then I was considered an independent. There were some areas, such as their literature, that I didn't like, and to use a Sunday School curriculum or some youth material that was not published by the convention was taboo.

Today, there are good conservative churches affiliated with the SBC supporting missionaries and various mission causes outside the convention. Many are using the Awana program for their youth. Awana is a good curriculum, but is not a SBC program. I think that what I've just mentioned is great and I've said all of that to say that back in my younger days, I was ahead of my time. When I did what is being done today, I was called an independent and not a loyal Southern Baptist.

What I didn't know when I left my church staff position and took the pastorate of which I began telling you about, is that I had three strikes against me from the start. In other words, when I took this church, I had struck out and had not even got up to bat. Let me explain. After I took the church, I found out that a former assassinational mercenary heard that I was talking with this church. He called the assassinational mercenary in that association and reported to the church that I was not a loyal Southern Baptist. They in turn called the pastor of the church where I was on staff. That church happened to be one of those rare breeds back then that didn't dot every "I" and cross every "T" in the SBC. The pastor gave me a good word, but never told me about these happenings until I had made the move and the bottom started falling out of my new pastorate.

It didn't take me long to discover that I had a problem church. In fact, the moving truck had just unloaded our furniture and started down the road back home, when a visit was paid to us in the parsonage. I was notified that the church had just chosen some men the previous Sunday who were to "run" for the office of deacon. They wanted me to meet with these men to determine their qualifications. Now, if you don't think that is putting the new preacher on the spot then I don't know what you call it. I did meet with the men, but I refused to fall into their trap. I remember talking with these men and found out very quickly that most of them were unfit to serve as dogcatcher, much less a church deacon.

This one man, I'll never forget. He told me that he only had one fault and that he cussed every now and then. I thought to myself, "That's all we need, a cussing deacon." After prayer, I felt like they had really created a bad situation for me and I just

turned the matter over to the Lord. I knew there was at least one man that the deacons did not want to get elected. After finding myself in the middle of this situation, I asked God to intervene in the outcome of the selection. I didn't really know these men other than what they told me in our meeting. I felt like I was between the rock and the hard place. It was like entrapment from day one! But then, God reminded me just how much that I needed "wisdom" (Jam. 1:5) to stand upon and "trust" (Isa. 26:4) in "Christ" my eternal "Rock" of ages (I Cor. 10:4). Little did I know that this was just a prelude of what was to come in this church.

Some time later, one of our better Sunday School teachers came to my study and showed me what had been printed in the Convention Uniform lesson for that particular Sunday. The writer said that as Paul wrote the 7th chapter of First Corinthians, he had "no divine imperative behind his advice. God had allowed him to speak but had not commanded him to do so. In light of Paul's certainty that he spoke the word of God in most instances, his words are noteworthy indeed. In this delicate area he had no divine revelation." (SS Adults, March 1979, page 64). As a young whippersnapper, the way he said it just didn't set well with me. I've since studied that passage and even dealt with it in my book on *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*. I still cannot agree with the way the writer put it in that lesson. I wrote the Sunday School Board and voiced my opinion.

There were times when I wrote to the Biblical Recorder, our State Baptist paper and voiced my opinions in "letters to the editor." Since the Wilmington Ten trial was held in the town where my pastorate was located, I even wrote to the editor about that. What I'm trying to say is that I was very vocal in my young years about the liberality found in the SBC. I look back on those days and tell the young guys of today that I paid my dues.

I did not (and still do not) see any "sacred cows" in the SBC. In total innocence, I scheduled a film crusade at the church and used films from Bob Jones University. Ever since my days with Youth for Christ, I used Christian movies to teach good moral lessons and thought nothing about it. Bob Jones had produced some really good movies and after scheduling the date and

advertising the crusade, the time came for the meeting. Nobody was more shocked than I was when I saw church buses rolling in our parking lot from Independent Baptist Churches located in neighboring towns. Needless to say this scared the wits out of our congregation and their imaginations ran away with them. They must have reported this to the assassinatorial mercenary because he came down hot and heavy on my case. He never liked me from the start.

I learned that some folk from the church had gone to talk with him about me. So, I took a friend along and we also went to see him. I don't remember everything that was said, but I do remember him telling me that he knew when I took that pastorate that the church was going to be the lawn mower and that I was going to be the grass. I also remember telling him that I did not apologize for being a theological conservative. His response to me was that he took his stand along beside Jesus and Jesus was a liberal and he was too.

I don't think that it was too long after that when I was notified that the church was circulating a petition to get rid of me. The petition stated, "I love my church and want it to be a cooperating New Testament Missionary Baptist Church, in good fellowship with other Southern Baptist Churches, therefore, I join with the following members of the church who believe it will be to the best interest of the church that we have a new pastor." I was told that this came from our dearly beloved assassinatorial mercenary.

What you need to know is that most of those attending were supportive of my ministry. There was a group that did not want to lose control and their attitude was "my way or no way." I never dreamed that a church could do what this church was about to do. I did not resign because I felt like I had done nothing worthy of resignation. On October 7, 1979, I was served with the following: "The pulpit committee (in this church the pulpit committee that was in force at the time the pastor was called, remained in force during the entire tenure of the pastor – need I say why?) brings the motion to the church that the duties of the pastor will be terminated upon the agreement that the church will pay him 90 days salary and moving expenses back to Greensboro

with the understanding that he will be moving back to Greensboro and vacating the church parsonage within 30 days, otherwise we will pay him only the 30 days notification salary as set forth in the pastoral call and the constitution and by-laws. We furthermore add to this motion that voting on this issue be made by secret ballot.”

This was given to me just before I walked out of my study and into the pulpit where I was expected to moderate, what turned out to be my firing. When I walked through the doors into the church auditorium and into the pulpit, I thought that I would drop my teeth. The church was packed out from front to back. I had never seen the church that full. In fact, there were people present who never heard me preach a single sermon. The only time many of them had ever seen me was when I made a pastoral visit to either their home or to the hospital to see them. All they knew is what they had been told by this group of “vipers” (Job 20:16) and “synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9). I was voted out. I was fired for not being as Southern Baptist as they wanted me to be. Following the vote, I took my family and we walked across the road to the parsonage where we lived. I heard latter that I was criticized for not remaining behind and greeting the people. That’s the way it was back in those days. Today, most conservative Southern Baptist pastors will pastor in a similar fashion as I did back then. However, the battle for the Bible had not yet been fought and won in the SBC at that time. It was just heating up.

The woman who led the revolt told me to do the preaching and let “them” run the church. I do not believe that the pastor is to be a dictator. In fact, I believe that God’s Word prohibits that (I Pet. 5:2-3). However, God expects the pastor to be the under-shepherd of God’s sheep. The problem this church had with the pastor was with his calling from God. This very woman who was more responsible for my firing than any other one person was dead and buried before we vacated the parsonage in the 30 day time period that was given us. We looked out the living room window from across the road and saw her body taken from the church for the last time. Only God knows where she is today. I can only hope that the Lord took her as she sinned the “sin unto

death” (I Jh. 5:16). There is no way that I could wish my worst enemy to spend eternity in hell.

If, you will, notice the wording of the motion from the pulpit committee. It said I had to move back to Greensboro within 30 days or else not get 90-days pay. Friends, a pastor just doesn’t generally relocate to a new pastorate that quickly. It takes time. It’s nothing unusual for a church and prospective pastor to be in dialogue anywhere from three to six months or longer. I had a wife, three small children, and lived in a church owned house out of which they were going to kick my family. I told you that most of the folks who attended services on a regular basis supported my ministry. Prior to the church taking this vote, some of my supporters got concerned and started talking about pulling out and starting a church if I got voted out. The church that was about to fire me got wind of this and for that reason, the motion was worded the way it was.

After I was fired, this group came to me and asked me to meet with them and consider staying and helping start a new church. They said that after seeing the way the assassinal mercenary involved himself in the affairs of the church, they wanted nothing to do with being a Southern Baptist Church. To be honest with you, at that time I felt the same way. I reached a point when I told God that I no longer wanted to be a Southern Baptist. The Lord eventually reminded me that He was not going to bless me because I was Independent or Southern Baptist, but because I preached His Word. I still say, even today, that no director of missions or any other convention agency has the right to stick their nose in the affairs of a local church. Every local assembly can chose to either affiliate or not with a denomination. I do not believe in any outside hierarchy over a local congregation. I’m a firm believer in the autonomy of a local church.

The church didn’t leave me a lot of options. I went to Greensboro and tried to find a place where I could afford to live. I found nobody to take pity upon me. If you got fired from a church, back in those days, people treated you like you had the plague. There was no help available from anyone when I got

fired and there were no open doors and very little time to make some decisions.

We drove down to a neighboring town of larger size from where I had been fired. As we drove around we located a house that was suitable and only affordable if I had an income. I asked the folks who had pulled out of the church that had fired me to write in their own hand how they really felt about me staying with them. I guess that I was seeking confirmation about the matter because I really didn't want to stay anywhere in the area. They assured me that they wanted me as their pastor and with the clock ticking away, I told them that I would stay. I remained with them for a period of about two years, but they became more like the church that fired me. Did I do the right thing? I did what I felt like I had to do at the time. Those were some hard times and very difficult decisions. Looking back on it, I don't know what I would have done differently at the time, but none of us can go back and relive the past. We can only learn from our mistakes and rejoice in the Grace of God. One thing for which I am so very thankful is the very "special couple" that God brought into our lives during those dark difficult days. They were members of the church that fired me as well as the church that was started afterwards. These folks loved and supported us at a time when we were at our lowest. To this day, they have remained some of our dearest and most treasured friends.

There is only one person in my entire life that I actually hated. It was the assassinational mercenary that instigated my firing. What he did was wrong, but the hate that I harbored in my heart was also wrong (1 Jh. 3:15). I carried that hate for several years and God kept convicting me of it until I finally had to make it right. I wrote him a letter in September of one year, asking him to forgive me for the hate that I had in my heart. It was about October that I heard from him. He wrote me a letter and was his same old nasty self. But, do you know what happened when I read his letter? I no longer hated him. I felt sorry for him. I'm so glad that I obeyed the Lord and wrote him when I did. He died the next December. It's really a shame for a person who calls himself a brother-in-Christ and colleague in ministry to "cut your throat," but I encountered that more than once. Actually, three

assassination mercenaries tried to “do me in.” I didn’t march to the beat of their drum and they “got it in for me.”

I also know what it’s like taking a new pastorate and having the former pastor keep his nose in everything that I tried to do. After he moved to a new church, I thought that he would have his hands full tending to his own flock, but that wasn’t the case. He took advantage of the church to which I came and the manner in which he had abused them made my job harder. Because of the way he had violated the church, the attitude of the people when I arrived was one of skepticism toward me. After proving myself to the congregation that I was not a scoundrel, they learned to trust me and follow my leadership.

There were two different churches that called me to be their pastor and an interim pastor prior to my coming had served them. Both of these men were retired ministers, but apparently did not want to give up the “ship.” Selfishly, they wanted to “keep the church” for themselves and prevent the congregation from calling me. I also had pastors that I didn’t even know who tried to speak evil against me and keep a church from issuing a call. Furthermore, I know what it’s like to open your arms and heart to a pastor without a church only to have him try and stab you in the back. There is NO place for jealousy, envy, selfishness, and politics in the ranks of the Christian church! If we are brothers in Christ, we ought to treat one another accordingly. If we know the love of God, then we should exhibit it and encourage each other instead of seeking our own selfish ambitions and political agendas. Each time someone tried to do me harm; God always sovereignly intervened and fought my battles.

I’m happy to report that since those early days of ministry and since the conservative resurgence in the SBC, I’ve had some really good friends who served as directors of missions. I don’t think that you will find as many control freaks in that position today as would have been found forty years ago. The SBC has come a long way since the days when I started out in ministry. I’m thankful for the progress that has been made and give God all the glory. My hope for the SBC now, is that they would fully return to their roots of Calvinism. They have come a long way and I pray for the day when they’ll embrace the Doctrines of

Grace, as did the founding fathers of the SBC. It's encouraging to see so many men, especially young men coming out of our seminaries and Bible schools, discovering these mighty truths and preaching the whole council of God.

The statistics that I shared at the beginning of this chapter on ministerial termination are over ten years old. However, I'm afraid it hasn't improved much since. LifeWay Christian Resources reported on October 2, 2006, that during 2005, over 1,000 pastors (they knew about) were dismissed in the SBC. It's been estimated that across denominational lines in the United States, over 1,500 ministers are dismissed from their positions each month. Several years ago, a report was issued that stated where 80% of seminary and Bible School graduates who enter the ministry, will leave it within five years. These statistics tell us that there is a spiritual cancer running rampant throughout our local churches and the only cure is surrender to the "Lord of Glory" (I Cor. 2:8) Who alone is "head of the church" (Eph. 5:23). The churches of our day stand in need of another mighty spiritual reformation.

Chapter 14

Learning About Providence

My first pastorate was a mission started and controlled by a sponsoring church. I've already told something about leaving that church and trying to start a church in the same city. We met in a public school until we could purchase land with a house, which we remodeled to meet our needs. It was in this new church start that my parents surprised me and joined the membership. I was glad to have them become a part of the congregation, especially after what I've already shared concerning my daddy not wanting to give me a job when I was jobless unless I promised not to pursue the ministry.

At first, I thought this was good indication that he had mellowed and accepted my call into the ministry. I'm afraid that was not the case. After two years in the new church, we disbanded and I was left without a paycheck. When I approached my daddy about a job in his business, he told me the same thing again. He said that he would give me a job if I promised to abandon my thoughts of going into the ministry. I could not make such a promise.

Years later, after getting fired and betrayed by the church that asked me to remain as their pastor (see chapter on The Firing of a Pastor), I returned to Greensboro to what I thought was to take over the family business. My daddy's health was not good at that time and he made promises to me that he did not keep. He intended it for evil, but God meant it for good. The Lord was teaching me about His divine providence, just like He taught Joseph when he said to his brothers, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Gen. 50:20).

With a wife and three children, I thought that I would become bi-vocational and try to find some stability in income and at the same time, serve the Lord and preach as God gave me opportunity. There is nothing wrong with bi-vocational ministry. The apostle Paul himself was bi-vocational as he made his living in the making of tents (Acts 18:3). In fact, I highly encourage young ministers today considering taking this direction in

ministry because more congregations are finding it harder to pay sufficient salaries for a man to support himself and his family. Besides, not being dependent upon a congregation for your salary has its pluses, especially when they get it in for you and want to set you out on the street. The ideal is for a church to pay a pastor enough so that he can be full time. Not only support him financially, but also pray for him and give him godly love, support, and encouragement.

It was during this time that my daddy told me that he was going to retire and turn the business over to me. When I moved back to Greensboro, we agreed that I would do the inside work and the route man would do the outside collecting. I made it clear that those were my terms and he agreed. I was not back no time when he told me that if I was going to run the business that I had to learn the outside route work, which was not part of the original deal. He also informed me that he was going to sell me the business. After doing some figuring, I discovered that the business was not worth what he was asking. My daddy “pulled the rug out from under me” (so to speak), and ended up closing the business, leaving me jobless again.

The only difference in being without a job this time, is that I was able to draw unemployment whereas when a church throws you out on the street, you have no such recourse. Naturally, during this time I looked for a job and when businesses learned that I had been in the ministry, they were skeptical. In fact, I had two more businesses that offered me a job, but told me that if they hired me, I had to promise not to pursue the ministry. I could not make that promise. By the grace of God we survived. I did odd jobs, like painting and even tried a paper route. It was during these hard days when I met Brother Lonnie who kept telling me to “stay sweet in my soul.”

It was also during this time when I met Brother James Talbert and took two evangelistic trips to South Korea (see chapter on Trips to Foreign Soil). Brother James took me under his wing and allowed me to do PR work with his evangelistic organization. It was during this time when I was given the opportunity to finish my education with Luther Rice Seminary (see chapter on My Schooling). Brother James also gave me

opportunities to preach for him in his pastorate while he was away. God opened various doors for me to do pulpit supply.

It was during this time period I was asked to preach for a church that had all but disintegrated. There was only a hand-full of people left due to an unbelievable fight in the church. When I say fight, I mean a real knock down drag out fight. The way it was described to me, there was such division in the congregation that the two different groups would conduct services at the same time in the same auditorium. One group on one side of the church and another group on the other side of the church separated by the isle down the middle. One night, things got so out of hand that they started throwing each other out the back door and some of the people ended up in the hospital emergency room. Sometime after all this happened, I was invited to preach to those who were left and even asked to take the church as their pastor. From my previous experience with trying to do a church start, I knew that was not my calling. Besides, after recently having a bad church experience, I didn't feel like I was up for such an undertaking. I personally felt like the best thing they could do was close their doors, which they did eventually.

When I came back to Greensboro, I had no idea in the world how things were going to turn out. After being double-crossed by my own father and finding myself without a job, I felt lower than a snake's belly. But, look at how God intervened! The Lord took these seemingly bad situations and used them for His glory and my good. He proved to me that He has a plan for my life and that His hand of providence is at work.

I must hang my head in shame and confess that there were times during those lean years that my faith grew weak. There were times when I even told God that I wasn't going to ever preach again. He seemed to say, "We'll just see about that." God put me behind the spiritual woodshed and gave me a licking that I'll never forget. He reminded me that "whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth" (Heb. 12:6). Chastisement is a mark of sonship! It is possible for a Christian to sin, but impossible to sin and get by with it. I'm thankful that my God is calling the shots and is so long-suffering. He is Sovereign over all things and His hand of providence prevails in the lives of His elect.

Chapter 15

Humorous Happenings

Everyone needs a sense of humor. It helps to be able to laugh even in the darkest of the night. Scripture admonishes us in Proverbs 17:22, “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.” My wife has been the jolly clown in the family and I’ve always leaned to the more serious side; however, that doesn’t mean that I’ve not tried to maintain a sense of humor. I don’t feel like the pulpit is the place for a comedian, but I’m not against an appropriate joke at the proper time and place. At home, we tried to laugh, even if it seemed silly to some.

My wife likes to remind me of the time I got up on the kitchen cabinet, perched, and cackled like a rooster. Down through the years, I can think of some “funny” experiences that I would like to share.

*In one of my first baptismal services, I had an experience that taught me a great deal about questions to ask prior to baptizing someone. It’s been said that we live and learn. I seem to be a person who has had to learn his lessons in life the hard way. Our baby daughter was sick; therefore, Ann had to stay home with her and was unable to attend the baptismal service. There were several people to be baptized and two of them were a husband and wife. I formed the habit early in my ministry that if a married couple were to be baptized that I would baptize them one after the other. I took the wife into the pool first and when I lowered her under the water, low and behold, her hair came floating off the top of her head and across the front of the pool. Like most pools, there was a glass plate across the front where everyone could see the water and her wig floating like a boat. I must admit that I lost it. I had to pick up her wig, hand it to her, and lead her to the handrails. I had to stay to the side until I could regain my composure. One thing that made it so hard is that I had to baptize her husband immediately after her. When I arrived home, I told my wife about the “once in a lifetime” service that she had missed.

*When Ann was expecting our last child; the church that I pastored gave her a baby shower. One day after the shower, our son who was about four years of age asked her, “Where they gave her the shower, in the men’s bathroom or the women’s?”

*It’s strange what people expect of a pastor and the kind of connections that they think he has. Some people treated me like I had a hot line to heaven. There was this one lady who gave us many laughs. She thought that I had a hot line to the President. One day she called the house and wanted the President’s address (that is the President of the United States). I don’t know why she thought that I would have it, but sometime thereafter, an address appeared in the daily news paper for correspondence with the White House and I wrote it down so that if I ever had that kind of request again, then I would be ready.

*We’ll never forget when this same lady, who requested the President’s address, scarred the wits out of us in the Sunday evening service. I was preaching and she was sitting down near the front to my left. All of a sudden she jumps up with a magazine in her hand and swats a fly on the pew in front of her. Needless to say, she got our attention and if anyone was napping, they were awakened.

*We had a canopy built in our parking lot and attached to the church building so that in the event of bad weather, people could drive through and let out their passengers and then locate a parking space. One Sunday when it was raining, I looked out and this same lady parked her car under the “drive through canopy” making it impossible for anyone else to use. She acted like we built that especially for her. When we think of this particular lady, we can’t help but chuckle. She was harmless, but a bit wacky. We’ll never forget the time when she needed to go to the hospital out of town and wanted our help. She wanted to take her car and leave it in the hospital parking lot because she was expecting to be admitted. She wasn’t able to drive, so Ann and I drove our car and our daughter drove this parishioner’s car. What turned out to be so funny is that we were waiting for her in the

waiting area of the hospital when we overheard her talking with the doctor. The doctor wanted to know what was wrong with her and she told him that she had knocked her kidney loose. We'll never forget the look on that doctor's face when he came out of the examining room.

*In most of my pastorates, I was the one who usually did the church bulletins. I'll never forget walking into the church facility one Sunday morning and saw the young people snickering. When I inquired as to what was so funny, they told me that it was the bulletin. I took a look for myself and discovered that a song for the morning service was "Whiter than Snow." However, I had hit the letter "S" instead of the "W." After that, I tried to be more careful, but if you'll notice on the keyboard that it was an honest mistake since the same finger hits both letters and one is just above the other. I'm not trying to make excuses for myself, but we all make mistakes, even preachers who type bulletins.

*One Sunday, I was left speechless and simply didn't know what to say. There was this fellow who told me that he was not going on the picket line in his place of employment because the Bible said that a Christian was not to be a striker. I could only assume that he was referring to one of the biblical requirements for a pastor found in First Timothy 3:3 in the King James Version. We know that this passage is talking about not being violent, but exercising self-control. If you wanted to stretch your imagination, I guess we could say that picketing can get violent, but refusal to go on strike is not what this passage is talking about. I'm not approving or disapproving of either union activity or the carrying of picket signs. We must simply keep scripture in context. However, this is a good reminder of how people can make the Bible say something that it does not say.

*Every Bible student will remember the story when Mary and Joseph left the boy Jesus behind in Jerusalem, thinking that He was somewhere else in the caravan. When they couldn't find Him, they returned to Jerusalem and after three days found Him in the temple dialoging with the people about the things of God

(Lk. 2:41-49). That story helps us find some comfort in what happened to us. Our two oldest children were both driving and had their own cars. Ann and I were usually some of the last people to leave the church. On this particular Sunday, Ann and I got in our car and saw none of our children anywhere in sight. We only assumed that our youngest son had caught a ride with one of his siblings, so we headed home. Soon after we walked in the parsonage, which was about two miles from the church, the telephone rang and we were informed that Wilson was waiting at church. He was playing with another boy whose parents were still at the church and we, like Mary and Joseph, thought that he was somewhere that he wasn't. Our friends dropped him off at the parsonage on their way home from church. It was terribly embarrassing to say the least, but I'm sure that like Mary and Joseph, we were just thankful that our boy was safe.

*When our youngest son was just a little fellow; we lived in a two-story house. One day our oldest son came down the steps and informed his mother as to what was going on upstairs. When Ann arrived in the room, which was shared by the two brothers, she saw the younger up against the window mooning the neighbors. She wanted to laugh her head off, but knew that she couldn't do that which would give him approval to do it again. Therefore, she took the necessary measures to make sure that he learned a lesson not to do any such thing again. Before coming to tell his mother, the elder son asked his brother why he was doing such a thing. His reply was, "because I'm hot." At that time neither of the boys knew what mooning was.

*Every Sunday as I preached, I noticed a man sitting over to my right. He was married with two children. I observed that he always had his hand cuffed over his mouth, but I never knew why until a lady in the church told me. He sucked his thumb in church and covered it with his hand. I guess this proves that some habits are just hard to break! It also illustrates the vast number of spiritual thumb suckers (spiritual babies) there are in a local church.

*I'm not going to get into the subject of invitations at the close of a church service. Personally, I'm not inclined to public invitations. The churches that I pastored were use to having a closing hymn, so that is what we had regardless of what people wanted to call it. Because of my view on invitations, I never gave high-pressure appeals. Due to what has been ingrained in most Southern Baptist, there are many people who like to come down to the front for whatever the purpose, mostly to make them "feel" better. As I said, I'm not going to speak to the subject of the public invitation system no more than what I've already said. However, I've said all of this to tell you about the most ridiculous response that I ever had to a closing hymn, which this church referred to as their invitation.

On this particular Sunday, we had a guest from the Baptist Children's Homes to speak and a special offering was received for their ministry. At the conclusion of the message, the music leader was directing the congregation and I was standing in front of the church. An elderly man stepped out of his pew, came to the front, gave some money (I don't remember if he placed it in the collection plate or put it in my hand), but he looked me in the face, and said, "my pail is full and I've got to go empty it." Out the door he went! I assume to the restroom.

*I'll never forget the guy who came to church one Sunday and requested prayer for his mother's constipation problem. I'm a firm believer in talking to God about anything and I certainly think that constipation can be a big problem. However, it's my opinion that we can request prayer for someone without going into all the detail, especially when it comes to constipation. By the way, do you know what the Chinese word is for constipation? The word is hung-chow.

*In one of my rural pastorates, we lived in a parsonage on a highway. We had no "next-door" neighbors. There were houses in sight of the parsonage, but nothing close. In fact, I'm not sure if the neighbors could even hear us if we yelled at them. When we moved into this parsonage, we were told that if we lived there long enough that the house would eventually be burglarized. It

was a rather lawless county and with houses being so isolated from one another, it was a prime target for criminals to break into your residence. We were told that the former pastor's wife was so terrified when her husband had to leave her alone that she sat in the house with a loaded gun while he was away.

During my tenure at this church, we did have numerous experiences of people that we believe cased out the house. We even had people coming to the house at all hours of the day and night, but learned to be discerning and not take any chances. I even went around and “fixed” the windows of the house where they would be next to impossible to open from the outside. Needless to say, the church folk never told us any of these things until after we accepted the call and moved into the parsonage.

It was about Thanksgiving time when we made the move and discovered that some of our church members, who also were some of our nearest neighbors, had their house burglarized. The thieves went into the people’s freezer and stole their Thanksgiving turkey. Some presents had already been wrapped for Christmas, but the robbers opened them so they could select which ones they wanted to steal. Now, none of the above is funny and we went to this church because it is the place where God called me to serve. I’ve said all of this to let you know how remote we lived from other houses in the community. What is funny is what I’m about to tell you.

Those folks who got the turkey stolen out of their freezer were some of our nearest neighbors, but we couldn’t see their house from ours. In fact, their house was surrounded on all sides by trees. One Sunday evening in the summer, our family decided to walk over and pay these dear folk a visit. (They were and still are such a fine couple. We’ve stayed in touch down through the years.) We went to the front of their house, but could not get anyone to the door; therefore, we walked around to the back of the house. As we rounded the corner into the back yard, all we saw was a dash of someone going into the house.

As the wife remained outside, we quickly discovered that it was her husband that took off inside. If someone runs from you when they see you coming, you ordinarily think that they don’t want anything to do with you. But, what happened was just too

funny not to tell. The wife informed us that her husband was standing outside of the house cutting watermelon in his underwear. When we surprised him, he took off into the house like a bullet out of a gun-barrel. After putting on additional clothing, he made his way out to greet us. To this day, whenever we either get-together with this couple or we talk on the telephone, all we have to say is watermelon, and we all burst out laughing. The area was just so isolated that he would step outside in his underwear to eat watermelon.

*While we lived in this same area, I did what I always wanted to do. I made a movie with my family performing the “acting.” Our youngest son was small and really big into GI Joe. We made home movies ever since our first child was born. These were the days of the super eight movies. I figured this was a good time to fulfill my dream of making a movie since there was nobody around to make fun of me. Because this was a “silent” movie, it made things much easier. I used hand printed “signs” to indicate the next scene. We made the movie and we all get a good laugh out of it to this day, especially our daughter (who was not too thrilled about the idea), as she walked around carrying the play rifle by the end of the gun barrel.

*Have you ever had your lawn rolled? Yes, rolled with toilet paper. We had never heard of such a thing until one Sunday morning we woke up while living in this same remote area and found toilet paper all over our front yard and hanging from the trees. I didn’t know that is what you’re supposed to do with toilet paper. We went to church and assumed that some of the youth in the congregation were responsible and just wanted to play a prank. The only thing to do was to try and be a good sport about it, but in all honesty, it wasn’t much fun to clean up that Sunday afternoon following church service. I’m sure it was intended as a joke and thinking back on it we can’t help but laugh when we picture in our mind’s eye the lawn covered in “butt dressing.”

*We had just witnessed one of the worst hurricanes that ever hit the eastern coast. Most of you who live in North Carolina will

remember Hurricane Hugo. It came ashore and packed a powerful punch way inland. Many homes were without electric power for days. We lived in an area that was greatly effected. At that time, we had a freezer full of chickens that we bought from the grocery store on special. With a household of three growing children, it didn't take long to devour that much food.

We were told not to open the freezer door in hopes of keeping in the cold. Unfortunately, the power was off for a lengthy period and not only did we lose what was in the freezer, but the odor of the thawed out chickens was so bad it took "forever" to get rid of the stench. The first Sunday after the storm went through, we conducted church services without any electricity. You must keep in mind, that everyone had been "roughing it," sort of like camping out indoors. This means no hot water to take a good bath like normal. When we all gathered for Sunday morning service, one of the ladies spoke up and said, "Raise your hand if you're SURE." For those of you who can remember that far back, that was a catchy phrase of a SURE deodorant commercial, which ran on TV back then.

*I know that funerals are not intended to be funny, but a "funny thing" happened to me. We had gone to church on this particular evening and someone mentioned to me about the funeral service that I was going to conduct. I responded that I knew nothing about such a service. I was told that they read in the newspaper where I was the one to conduct the funeral. Immediately, I called the funeral home, and discovered that I was to conduct the service, which I did at the appointed time. Don't you know that preachers are supposed to be mind readers and know everything about everybody?

The strange thing about this funeral service is that the lady who died was the "girl-friend" of a man whose wife was buried in our church cemetery. His "girl-friend" was also buried in the same cemetery. It seems like they were buried close together. The man died after I left this pastorate and we often wondered if he was buried between the two women. That episode reminded us of a joke about a man who outlived his two wives, Lilly and Tilly. Before he died, he left word that upon his burial he wanted

to be buried between the two women, but was to be tilted toward Tilly.

*There was this particular married man who attended every church service. We never saw his wife. On his property, there were two houses, a big house and behind the big house was a little house. He lived in the big house and his wife lived in the little house. To each his own said the woman who kissed the cow.

*There was another funeral service where a rather “funny thing” happened to me. The main service was held in a funeral home chapel in one town, but the burial was to be at a country church cemetery about an hour and a half away. The family gave me directions, but there are some folks who don’t know how to give very good directions. I call them country directions. Country directions go something like this, “go down the road a little ways and look for the house with pecan trees in the front yard or go down the road and look for an old barn back off the road.” They don’t realize how many houses have pecan trees or just how many old barns there are in the area. This was one of those cases!

As I was approaching the area where I thought the cemetery was located, I noticed several cars behind me. We were traveling a back road with not much traffic so I concluded that these folks behind me were also on their way to the cemetery. After starting to get a little alarmed as to my whereabouts, I pulled over to the side of the road and so did the cars behind me. I guess they recognized me from the service in the funeral home. I went back and asked them if they knew where they were going and if they had any idea as to where the cemetery was located. Each driver told me they didn’t know anything about the area and they were in hopes that I did. The directions that were given me were not clear, so I turned around and stopped at a lumberyard. I was told that I was near the cemetery and all I had to do was go straight down the road until I came to the next forks in the road and then turn left at the forks. I got in my car and came to the next intersection. It was not a fork in the road, but a full intersection where two roads crossed one another. I stopped right in the

middle of my lane and asked the drivers behind me if that is what the people in that area called forks in the road. They didn't know any better than I, but we all agreed that was no forks in the road. However, going on my gut instinct, I turned left and just a little way down the road, I saw the church on the right and the cemetery on the left. I knew it was the right place because the hearse and funeral home director were still waiting for the rest of the family to arrive. I'm glad that I wasn't late, but even more so, I'm glad that we found it.

*Shortly, after this experience, someone sent me a joke by e-mail to which I could easily relate. The joke goes something like this. A young pastor just graduated from seminary and had taken his first church. The local funeral home director called and told him about the death of an elderly man who had outlived all of his family. They informed him that there would only be a graveside service and wanted to know if he would conduct it. The young pastor thought for a moment and figured that it was a good opportunity to practice since he had never done a funeral. He agreed, but was told by the funeral home director that the only problem was that the burial was going to be in a very remote location and he had to give himself plenty of time to find it.

The day came for the funeral and the young pastor started out. He followed the directions that had been given him to the best of his ability, but it was past the time when he was to meet the hearse. It was about an hour past the scheduled time to meet, but he kept driving and driving until he came across a backhoe with two men standing beside the hole. The pastor parked his car, went up to the men, looked down and saw the slab with some dirt over the top when he asked if they would mind him saying a few words before they completed their job. The men looked at one another and both said that it was fine with them. This young pastor waxed real eloquent and gave a beautiful funeral sermon. When he was done, he thanked the men and started toward his car. About the time he opened the car door, he overheard one of the men say to the other, "I've never seen anything like this in all my years of putting in septic tanks."

*During a pastoral visit to the hospital to see one of our elderly church members, I was asked a question that I had never been asked before. This lady was a very sweet, kind, and gentle type woman. I don't remember why she was in the hospital, but during our conversation, she asked me how I liked her robe. I've never had a church member to ask me such a question, but I was a little taken back. All I said was that it was a pretty robe. Then, she went on to tell me why she asked that question. She informed me that it had been her old KKK robe that she had worn when she was married to her first husband.

*When our oldest son was in kindergarten; he really liked his teacher and was especially fond of the assistant teacher. The assistant was a young black lady. One day, they were trying to get him to dance and he told the assistant, "if you were white and your daddy was a Baptist preacher, you wouldn't dance either."

*When I went to one of my pastorates, it was their custom for the ladies to take up the Sunday morning offering every so often. Four ladies would sit on the front pew until it came time to receive the offering. I don't remember just how long we had been in this church, but Ann (who is a big joke teller) told a joke about a couple who went to talk with the preacher about getting married. It was agreed that the marriage ceremony would be conducted on a Sunday immediately following the morning worship service. The Sunday came and the preacher asked for those who wanted to get married to please come forward. When he asked the question, four old maids stood up. For whatever the reason, those four ladies (who were not old maids) didn't want to take up the offering anymore. It just so happened that the church I pastored before that one had about five spinsters in it. I'm certainly not making fun of spinsters. I prefer to call them unclaimed treasures. I've told people that it's better to be single than to wish you were.

*We once had a dog-named "Dolly" that was given to us by some friends. It was a mixed breed and as a puppy, we had no idea how big it would grow. From the size of the paws, we

assumed that she would be a rather big dog. She was really a good dog, but I would occasionally tap her gently on the rear with our children's big plastic ball bat in order to correct her. I can assure you that it was a gentle tap and I certainly didn't hurt the dog. One night when we came home, it was very dark and I had to cross the road to check our mailbox. As I was standing at the mailbox, I looked up and saw "Dolly" running down our driveway toward me and then I saw a car coming down the road. I yelled out for "Dolly" to stop, but she didn't stop before the car hit her. It knocked her into the ditch and I heard her whining. I was faced with a decision that I never thought that I would have to make. We were financially strapped and I could not afford to take her to the vet. I didn't know anything else to do, but to get my gun and put "Dolly" out of her misery. I went inside, loaded my gun, and as I walked outside, "Dolly" came limping down the driveway and got into her little doghouse. Then, I became fearful that she would die inside that little doghouse and I would have to disassemble it in order to get her out. Eventually, she recovered, but for a long time she kept her distance from me. I don't know if it was because she thought I hit her with the ball bat, or if she knew that I loaded my gun.

*Back when our oldest son started to school, he was like a lot of children in the fact that he didn't want to go. One day after complaining to his mother about not wanting to go to school, Ann told him that if he didn't go to school that his parents would be put in jail. Everyday, I would take the children to school in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon. On the way to and from school, we would go by the local prison camp. Those little eyes were wide open. When Ann told him that if he didn't go to school that we would be put in jail, our son said, "Momma, I wish that we didn't have a jail here."

*I became pastor of one church that had the dumbest looking contraption hanging from the ceiling of the auditorium. It was a down right spooky looking candle hanging on a chain. The church burned candles in it until the candles were all used up. Come to find out it was a memorial light given in someone's

memory. To me, it was tacky and I had to stand in the pulpit every Sunday and look at the stupid thing. Well, you know what they say; “beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.” I was glad when all the candles were consumed. To me, it looked like something that belonged in a horror house.

*I honestly hesitate to tell you this, but I don’t think I can resist. You’ll never again hear this song the same way. The wife of one of our former music directors told us a joke about the preacher who was going to preach on the subject of sex. He asked the choir director to select a song that might be appropriate. It was a mostly elderly congregation and the song chosen was Precious Memories.

*When our children were still living at home; you never knew what was going to be next. One time we went out to a restaurant and our oldest son picked up the mustard and accidentally sprayed it all over the place. Another time when we went out to eat, our youngest son had a play gun in his pocket. When we got to the cash register, he pulled it out and pointed it at the cashier. Fortunately the cashier thought it was funny.

*Sometime after graduation from high school, our daughter went away to a Bible Institute for one year. She only came home a few times because of the distance. On her next to the last trip home before she completed her one-year program, she left an apple in a suitcase under her bed. She was always a pack rat. Our older son was using her room while she was away and he told us that he smelled something like apples. After a thorough search of the room, we discovered what she left behind. We’re just thankful that we found it when we did and it wasn’t any worse ... a rotten apple.

*One day I gave a young couple in our church a phone call. They had a little boy that they were trying to get out of diapers. When I called, the little fellow answered the phone. I told him who I was and we just had a little conversation at which time he told me that he had used the potty. He was really proud of

himself and had every right to be. After his mother overheard what he told me, she came to the phone and was embarrassed. I told her there was no need for embarrassment. We had three children and had gone through the process of potty training them and it's really a big accomplishment for a little one.

*On my first mission trip to South Korea, I had the opportunity to preach in a manufacturing area of the city. The plant had a room set aside for their workers to conduct church services. I preached through an interpreter and had a delightful time of sharing God's Word. The people were so very kind and gracious. They wanted to give me something and when I opened the gift, it was a lady's wig. I gathered that this place where I preached was a wig factory and I brought it home for my wife. She still has it to this day, but doesn't wear it. It's the wrong color.

*When talking with pulpit committees (pastor search committees), we've been asked some really dumb questions. Questions that have nothing to do with pastoring a church. I don't know what people think a pastor's family is suppose to be like. We're not perfect, but just regular people who deal with the same problems in child rearing as everyone else. To illustrate my point, I recall one church that asked if we ever fussed at our children. Now, just stop and let that sink in. I only know of one set of parents who raised a perfect child and that was Mary and Joseph and the child was Jesus. Have you ever fussed at your children? Well, so have we!

*I'm going to make a confession. While I was in the pastorate, there were some things that I had to grin and bear. Now, I confess, I don't like covered dish meals. There are several reasons why I dislike them. One reason is because most of the food is placed on the table hours in advance and is cold by the time you have to eat. Ann usually prepared something in the crock-pot and left it plugged into an outlet. I made sure to eat what she prepared. Another reason is because not everyone knows how to cook. Enough said. I guess the number one reason

why I don't like covered dish meals has to do with hygiene. How would you like to eat from a dish of food with a utensil placed therein and that utensil had been stuck in someone else's mouth? Ann remembers seeing a grown woman tasting the food from a serving spoon and then putting it back in the dish. If that is not enough to turn you off, then what would it take? On a few occasions, when pastoring in rural areas, I remember having covered dish meals outside. That is outside next to the cow pasture. Flies everywhere. Flies on the food. Just where do you think those flies had been in the cow pasture?

*Lapel microphones are a wonderful invention, especially in one instance that happened to me. It was a Sunday evening and the service had just begun. A man became ill and was escorted by his wife out the side door as the church was in the midst of singing a song. As the music director continued the service, I followed them out the door to inquire what was wrong and if there was anything I could do. When I returned back into the auditorium, I was informed that my lapel microphone was on and the congregation heard our conversation and got a first hand update as to what was happening. Needless to say, I didn't have to repeat what was told me in the parking lot. There was another time that I cannot remember, but according to our oldest son, he says that there was a time when I had my lapel microphone attached to my belt and went to use the rest room. He claims that the "mic" was "on" and everybody heard the "flush."

*One of the things most pastors are expected to do is visit church members in the hospital. One of the ladies in the congregation informed me that she was going to have surgery and gave me the time and place for the operation. When I arrived, I went to where I thought she was supposed to be, but low and behold I couldn't seem to find her. I knew that I was in the right hospital and in the area where surgery patients were held prior to going into the operating room. I looked in the room that was assigned to her, but it didn't look like her. After passing the room several times, I came to realize that she was in that very room. She did not have her make-up on and I didn't recognize

her without it. In fact, I didn't know just how much make-up she wore until that day.

*While living in one neighborhood, the parsonage was in a very nice community, but the man living next door could be a pain in the backside. I always tried to be nice to him, but it wasn't always easy. His wife was a dear lady and I often wondered how she put up with him. He and his wife were members of another Baptist Church in town and I was a friend with their pastor.

With the passing of time, the ornery soul became sick and I even went to see him in the hospital. He did seem to mellow somewhat after this, but eventually died. Their pastor asked if the family would like to have me participate in his funeral. I'll never know exactly why he made such a suggestion and it would have been fine with me if I had been left out of it. The neighbors that lived on the other side of this cantankerous fellow can best describe the reason for me saying that. Before the funeral, they said that they were curious as to what I was going to say in the funeral service. They knew that I wasn't going to lie, but what could I say nice about him? When it comes to such a time as this we must remember that there is so much bad in the best of us and so much good in the worst of us that it hardly behooves any of us to talk about the rest of us!

*In several of my pastorates, we used an automated telephone calling system known as the Phone Tree. When programmed, it would call and leave a message to the household that was selected. We had just purchased our first Phone Tree when I decided to use it in sending out a message to the churches in our local association. I was serving on an associational committee and wanted to get a message out to the churches pertaining to an upcoming meeting.

I thought that I was being helpful and doing something smart. The only problem is that when I programmed the message, I hit the AM button instead of the PM button. This meant that the message was scheduled to go out in the wee hours of the morning rather than in the afternoon. I did not realize what I had done

until I was awakened from sleep, in the “middle of the night,” by a pastor friend. He kindly informed me that he had received my message and wanted me to know what was happening. I immediately dressed and drove over to the church where the Phone Tree was located and stopped the messages from going out and waking more poor preachers who needed their much deserved rest.

While I was making my way over to the church, Ann kept calling the church telephone line, trying to interrupt the calls from going out. She successfully was able to do this until I could arrive on the scene. When our associational meeting was held, all that I could do was apologize. I felt terrible about what I had done. It was my mistake and mine alone. Believe it or not, but the people were very kind and understanding. I don't believe that very many had received the message at the time the mistake was caught. But, needless to say, one was one too many. This just goes to prove how imperfect I am and that this was just one of my many mistakes.

*When our children were in elementary school, we had our first encounter with the reality of lice. A letter was sent home from school, informing us about a lice problem among some of the children attending school. Ann remembers me making a comment to some of our church members about this and referring to lice as “cooties” to which they became offended. I never intended to hurt anyone's feelings, but this just goes to prove that it doesn't take much to offend some people. Fortunately, our children never brought home anything more than this letter. However, this reminds me of the old saying, “cleanliness is next to godliness.”

*During choir practice, a cricket got loose in the room and Ann started to step on it. Immediately, someone stopped her, retrieved the cricket, and released it outside. They told her that it was bad luck to kill the cricket to which she replied, “I'm not superstitious.” I'd never heard of such a thing in all my life. This would be downright humorous if it wasn't so sad. Here are people who profess faith in Jesus Christ, sing the Lord's praises

on Sunday, and are filled with superstition. Superstition and Christian faith simply do not mix any better than oil and water.

*Julie, our firstborn, always had a stubborn streak. As a little tot, she was doing something she shouldn't and I asked her if she wanted me to give her a whipping. She said, "Yeah, give me one," and guess what happened?

*When Stuart, our oldest son, was small, he came home from church one Sunday and asked his mother why I was preaching about him in my morning sermon. My message was on STEWARDSHIP and he thought that sounded enough like his name to make him think that I was talking about him.

*None of our children were mean. In fact, we were very pleased with the behavior of our children whenever we took them out in public. They were just children and did as children do. We never knew what Wilson, our youngest son, was going to do next. He did such things as throw his little ball down the heat vent and cut the phone cord with scissors. As a child he liked to play GI Joe and talked about joining the army. That is, until he saw a program on TV about how the soldiers were yelled at. Then he inquired about the Salvation Army. One Christmas, while we were eating our meal at the table, he let out a big "burp." When he did so, I asked him what it was that he was to say. Expecting him to say, "Excuse me," he said, "Merry Christmas." We couldn't help but laugh.

Chapter 16

A Sacred Place

When I first had to face the short dress issue in the church, it was early into my ministry. When I went to this particular church, a young lady was our music director. She wore short dresses in the pulpit. I mean really short dresses, mini-skirts, as they were called. Finally, I simply suggested to her that she might want to consider that kind of attire especially in the pulpit. Outside the pulpit was bad enough, but on a raised platform? Well, I think that you get the picture.

This reminds me of the joke about a young woman, wearing a short dress, who walked in front of two elderly men in church one Sunday. She dropped her bulletin and bent over to pick it up. One of the men looked at the other and asked, "Is that FANNIE GREEN," to which he replied, "No, it's just the way the light is shining on it."

Needless to say, the young lady to whom I spoke got angry with me. She even sicced her father-in-law on me. The end result was bedlam. She resigned. I guess she thought that it was either wear her short dresses in the pulpit or quit, so she quit.

I later found out that this same church had all kinds of moral problems in their history. I hadn't been at this church very long when I started to get bad vibrations from the community about this congregation. Finally, one Saturday our next door neighbor, who was a member of my congregation, came to the parsonage and told me that she and her family were joining another church. The reason she gave started to unravel the mystery as to why the community hated this local church that I was trying to pastor. She told me that when they came to church on Sundays they looked over and saw a man in the congregation who had previously pastored that church several pastors before my arrival onto the scene.

What she told me left me in a state of shock! I learned that this pastor had moved a house to the rear of the church property where he would take the young boys in the church "camping." He molested the boys! That is bad enough, but to make matters

worse, the church did nothing in way of correction or discipline. The pastor resigned, but no action was taken against him. In fact, after several years, this former pastor was still holding his head high and coming back to the church. I knew that he had been a former pastor there and that he was no longer in the ministry, but I had no idea of the history behind his pastorate, until my neighbor “spilled the beans.”

The next morning, which was Sunday, I met with our chairman of the deacons and told him about my encounter with our next door neighbor. He admitted that what she told me was true and wanted to know if I desired to hear the full story. I told him that it was not the fact that I wanted to know, but at this stage of the game I felt like I needed to know what I was dealing with. He said that due to the length of the story that I should meet him back at church that afternoon. After Sunday lunch, we met for most of the afternoon and I heard a sordid tell of immorality that would put modern day soap operas to shame. He told me about how the church brought in professional counselors to deal with the boys and families effected by the molestation. He also admitted that the pastor was never disciplined. Furthermore, he went on to tell me of Sunday School teachers and church leaders who had lived in immorality. I felt like I was in Sodom and Gomorrah.

It wasn't too long after that when I discovered that our church pianist who was also teaching a child's Sunday School class was living with someone outside of holy matrimony. Simply put, she was “shacking up.” By the way, let me add that she was the daughter of our chairman of the deacons! He also held a high profile job with the State of North Carolina.

I really didn't care whose daughter she was. All I knew is that we had to deal with her. The church wasn't use to dealing with sin in the camp, but this was one preacher who was not going to sweep it under the rug. Therefore, we approached this matter biblically following the guidelines laid out for us in Scripture (Matt 18:15-18). We first of all made contact and tried to line up a meeting where we could discuss the matter with her and one of the deacons. She did not show up for the meeting. We contacted her again, telling her the importance of talking with her

or else we would be forced to take church action. The second time, she refused; therefore, we brought the matter to the church and removed her from church membership.

When I left this pastorate, one of the deacons (the father-in-law of the woman who had been our mini-skirt wearing music director) told our disciplined member that she could come back to church now because I was gone. She told him that she was not coming back because what “that preacher did was right.” There was more hope for the girl living in immorality than for the poor depraved deacon. It’s hard to believe how one church could be so saturated with lust, but it reminded me of the Corinthian Church to whom Paul wrote (I Cor. 5:1-13).

A pastor is often asked all sorts of questions and sometimes the requests that are made of him are overwhelming and sometimes startling. I hadn’t been pastor at this church very long, when a man from the congregation paid me a visit at the parsonage. His daughter was dating a young man and the two of them had been attending Sunday services. This was good! He wanted to join the church. This was good, I thought at first! But, this father went on to tell me that this young man was shackled up with his daughter and her lover was wondering if I would receive him as a church member under those conditions. This was Bad! Very Bad! He had sent the girl’s father to do the asking.

I did what any God called pastor should do. I told him the truth. In love for my Lord and for His Holy Bride, I informed them that I would not receive anyone into the membership of the church while living in fornication. After the father delivered the verdict to the couple, I did not see them for some time. However, several years later, they both showed up at church one Sunday. I found out that they had not only gotten married, but also saved and wanted to join the church. It was a joy to receive them into fellowship. I’ll never forget the day when I read my resignation from this church to accept another pastorate. It was this young man who was the most upset over my departure.

When a pastor changes churches, he inherits all kinds of stuff, sometimes baggage, from previous history. Some may be good and some may be bad. An advantage to starting a new church is that the founding pastor doesn’t have to deal with what

has happened before him. However, one must be called to plant a church from scratch.

In one of my pastorates, we had a committee of two people. Those two people happened to be a man and a woman who were married, but not to each other. It was brought to my attention that a rumor was floating around that the two of them had been seen together in public. That alone does not prove anything, but it was not a good idea to form a committee of that description and have them meet at church alone to plan the Christmas program. I simply suggested to the nominating committee that they change the Christmas committee and not create a situation with that kind of ratio. The committee agreed. What I need to tell you is that the man and woman committee had held that position for years and it wasn't going to be given up without a fight. It did get changed and if nothing else happened between the two of them, all I can simply say is that the church did what needed to be done to help them "abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thess. 5:22).

Because of the nature of what occurred in one church, I will not go into much detail or have much to say, except to mention the episode. Only God knows how many people come to church, like this family, week after week, for all services and do like this daddy during the week.

One day, a wife and mother of her two children, called and told me some startling news. She informed me that she just found out that her husband had been molesting their oldest son. She wanted me to come to their home and talk with her husband. There are many things that a pastor does not like to do and I can assure you that this was one of them. To begin with, I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. I remember sitting in their home and telling him that if at any time during my visit he wanted me to leave, then all he had to do was instruct me accordingly and I would gladly do so. Otherwise, I was there to talk about these accusations.

To my surprise, he confessed and admitted to what he had done. I tried to do all I could within my limitations to help this family and recommended further help. Once again, because of the nature of this matter, I'll not go any further. I mention this to let it be a warning in the day and time in which we live. When

you attend a church service, send your children to a Sunday School class, or a youth activity, you really don't know with whom you associate; therefore, "be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt.10:16).

In another church that I pastored, we had a music director who insisted on doing her own thing. I'll never forget one night during a revival effort. I walked out into the pulpit and saw the choir sitting in the congregation. The music director had invited her sister to come and sing. When it came time for the special song, her sister sang beautifully, but what went along with it was not "my cup of tea." To each his own and I know that what I'm getting ready to tell you is liked by a lot of people. However, I'm of the persuasion that it's not appropriate for the pulpit. As the song was being sung, a young lady with glowing blond hair, dressed in a skintight black top and black tights, and I mean as tight as they could get, did what is called "interpretive dance." It reminded me of the daughter of Herodias as she danced before King Herod and asked for the head of John the Baptist (Mk. 14:6). This very shapely young lady wiggled from the top of her head to the soles of her feet everything there was to wiggle. Needless to say there were some, who enjoyed it, but others like myself, disapproved.

Without making a scene in the pulpit, I ignored saying anything about it at the time, but called a meeting of the deacons early the next Sunday. I told them that I would not have that type thing in the church where I pastored or in the pulpit where I preached. The vast majority agreed with me. One of the younger men took exception to my position reminding me of David and how he danced going into Jerusalem (II Sam. 6:14). This just goes to show how you can take the Bible out of context and make it say anything that you want it to say, using it to one's own personal advantage.

The end result was that the deacons called the music director into a meeting and the chairman put it to her very clearly. He told her that she must cooperate with the pastor or else. If she refused, then she was going to have to leave. She said that she would resign which she did.

Self-righteousness is a terrible thing regardless of when or where it raises its ugly head. I remember a man who got angry over the church electing a divorced man to serve as a deacon. He also was serving as a deacon at the time, but was so upset over the matter that he left the church. Regardless of how you feel concerning divorced men serving in that office, get a load of this. From what people told me about this man's past, he was only married one time, but had been unfaithful to his wife and fathered a child out of wedlock. I never knew this for a fact, but it seemed to be common knowledge around town. Now, here is a man who was serving as a deacon with that kind of reputation but refused to accept a newly elected divorced deacon. Most of us like to think that our sin is not as bad as the sin of others. We're all sinners. We just don't all sin in the same identical ways. Praise God that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). Let's never forget that the church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum of self-righteous saints.

I know that a local church is not a perfect place, but I believe there are holy standards that we need to strive to meet. Although, we are going to fail in living up to those standards, it should never cease to be our goal to strive towards them. I believe that the Church is the bride of Christ and that the local church is a sacred place along with the pulpit from which the Word of God is to be proclaimed. It's not a place of mere entertainment, but a place to bring glory to God as the people of God are built up in the most holy faith. It's a place for God's people to "grow in grace" (II Pet. 3:18).

I'm afraid that today, so much of the world is in the church that you can hardly tell that the church is in the world. Every Sunday, in one of my pastorates before going out to preach the morning message, a group of men would gather in my study to pray. On such an occasion, a man spoke up and blurted out, "we need to start doing things in the church like the world does it." I was shocked to hear this man make such a remark. Let me add that this was not a young man, but one of the elderly gentlemen in the congregation. My response to him was that he had to be "kidding," but unfortunately he wasn't. Churches of our day need to return to a belief that a local assembly should be a sacred place

and especially the pulpit where the Word of God is to be preached without compromise.

I'm not against doing new things in the church as long as they don't lose a sacred flavor. In several of my pastorates, I did a twelve-week preaching series on the Twelve Disciples and then concluded with a pageant. Twelve different men designed their own attire and summarized the life of their biblical character. Their wives helped with their clothing and in decorating the auditorium. The service was concluded with the observance of the Lord's Supper.

In one of my pastorates, we conducted a service where married couples could renew their wedding vows. It was a very "special" occasion for all that participated. The congregation went all out. Regardless of how long or how short a time the couples had been married, they could participate. The auditorium was decorated like a wedding. The entire Sunday morning service was devoted to the occasion and a good many took part. Afterward, we went to the fellowship hall that was decorated like a reception, cake and all. It was a beautiful remembrance for everyone and a reminder of the sacredness of marriage.

I personally believe that God's work ought to be supported by the free will giving of God's people. In other words, I'm not into church fundraising. I believe that the biblical mandate is for God's people to give of their tithes and offerings in the support of kingdom work. I took the pastorate of one church that was "big" into fundraising. Annually, they conducted a barbecue sell that would rake in thousands of dollars in one night and a day. All I did was preach the word. I never attacked them on the issue. After some time as their pastor, I got the shock of my life. In one of our deacon's meetings, a deacon spoke up and said that he had come under conviction about this matter of fundraising and wanted to recommend that the church stop it. I went around the room and asked how the other deacons felt and everyone that was in the room agreed. They admitted that most of them didn't like it, but just went along with the crowd. Only one deacon was not present at that meeting and it turned out that he was the only one who objected. Later, I learned that the very deacon who said that he had come under conviction over the matter is the very one

who started the fundraising to begin with. God does work in strange ways. God's work is holy and even the manner in which we support it should bear evidence of its sacredness.

Not only do I dislike the idea of church fundraising; I also dislike the idea of selling tickets for "church performances." Many "pulpits" of our day have been turned into "stages" upon which people are being merely entertained. Fortunately, I never had to contend with that in any of my pastorates, other than the barbecue sell that I just wrote about. I did have to voice my opinion on such things as yard sells when asked. Ticket sells are becoming big business for some churches today. I'm afraid that it will someday bring the wrath of the federal government down on the church. However, I'm not so sure that the wrath of Almighty God is already falling upon many visible churches of our day.

"And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the sets of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." (Matt. 21:12-13)

Chapter 17

Suffer The Little Children

Jesus said in Mark 10:14, “Suffer the little children to come to me and forbid them not.” I’ve always loved children and tried to make them a vital part of my ministry. When I pastored churches with little children that would participate, I had a time during the Sunday Morning Service that I called “The Booster Band.”

Some churches have a children’s sermon, but I had a Booster Band. I got the idea from Rev. Sherman Young who was my wife’s pastor prior to our marriage. He was also the pastor that performed our marriage ceremony as well as the pastor who took me under his wing and encouraged me as a young preacher. Brother Young had a Booster Band of little children and he sang a song with them that went like this: “I belong to the Booster Band, I belong to the Booster Band, for God and right I’ll take my stand, I belong to the Booster Band. Everybody ought to be a booster, a booster, a booster. A booster won’t knock and a knocker won’t boost, everybody ought to be a booster.”

I got my idea from Brother Young and the children loved the time that I would spend with them on Sunday’s. There were other songs that I would sing with the children. Another, which I learned from Brother Young, was sung to the same tune as the Booster Band Song, but it went like this: “Everybody ought to go to Sunday School, Sunday School, Sunday School. The men and the women and the boys and the girls, everybody ought to go to Sunday School.” There were actually several verses to that little song which included, “Everybody ought to know the golden rule.” But, the one that brought a smile to everyone’s face was the one: “Everybody ought to pay the preacher, the preacher, the preacher, the men and the women and the boys and the girls. Everybody ought to pay the preacher.”

I’ve never been gifted with the ability of singing, but the children didn’t care if I could sing or not. I was spending time with them and that’s all that mattered to them. We sang songs called, The Devil is a Sly Ole Fox, If You’re Happy and You

Know It, O Come and Go with me up to my Father's House, This Little Light of Mine, and many others.

There is one thing that I learned the hard way. It was never to ask the children what they wanted to sing. I remember in one church where I asked that question and a little boy spoke up and said that he wanted to sing "Achy Breaky Heart." Well, dumb me, I had never heard of that song, but I did learn that it was best for me to select the tunes.

In the early years of my ministry when our children were small, I purchased a Charlie McCarthy dummy and made him into Charlie Churchman. I never perfected being a ventriloquist, but the kids didn't care. They just liked looking at the dummy and listening to the Bible stories. That little dummy opened doors for me that otherwise would have never been opened. The public school would not allow me to come and give a devotional, but I was invited to go to various classrooms and tell Bible stories through Charlie Churchman.

My wife and I both were active in our Vacation Bible Schools down through the years. I'll never forget three little boys who were not members or attendees of the church that I pastored. The mother simply dropped them off for VBS to get them out of her hair. The first night of VBS was "something else" with these three. Never before had I dealt with such unruly kids. Somehow, they even got onto the roof of our fellowship building. The second night, I was waiting for them at the front door when they arrived. Immediately, I ushered them into a side room and sat them down. I told them that I loved them, but there was no way they were going to stay and be part of our VBS unless they controlled their behavior. I told them that they had to make a decision as to whether or not they were going to behave. If not, then I wanted them to call their parents right then (I pointed to the telephone in the corner of the room) and tell mom or dad to come and get them. We wanted them to stay, but they had to act right or else. Those children looked at me, then looked at the telephone, and said that they wanted to stay.

As soon as opening assembly was over, I went to the classroom with these boys and sat between them until I had to leave. I kept my eye on these children often and they knew that I

was watching them like a hawk. In fact, when they didn't see me, they would ask the teacher, "where's the preacher?" We never had any more trouble with them the rest of the week. That was many years ago, and I heard that some if not all three ended up serving time in prison. All I know for sure is that we tried to have a positive spiritual influence upon them at that time. We even went to visit in their home after VBS, but the parents never responded by coming to church services.

There was one church in particular that I pastored where I had a special ministry to the children. Before going to this church and talking with the pulpit committee, they asked me if I liked children. I replied that "I did." They explained the reason for asking that question is because the former pastor who had been there many years didn't like children and children know if you like them or not.

On my very first Sunday there as pastor, I had the Booster Band and children seem to come out of the woodwork. The entire front of the church was filled with children. Of course, there were an unusually large number of people that first Sunday because they had to come and check out the new preacher. As time progressed, I heard some negative remarks from within the congregation about children being in the Sunday morning service. That burnt me up! These children were not misbehaving and as far as I'm concerned, a church without children is as good as dead.

These old codgers who did the complaining were part of the problem, not part of the solution. Spiritually speaking, for the most part this church was dead. I probably did more evangelistic preaching in this pastorate than about any other. To the praise of the glory of God's grace, I did see some people glorious converted to the Lord Jesus Christ. However, as I tried to get the teachers and youth workers to better indoctrinate the children, it was like talking to the wind. Someone had been appointed to direct the VBS the first year that I went to this church. The boogie-woogie music and all the wagging of rear-ends for Jesus was just too much for me.

After our first VBS, I took over directing it and I never put any pressure on the children to "make a decision for Jesus."

Trusting Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit, not mortal man. Especially, when it comes to children, we must be careful not to get them to do what we want, but leave the work of conversion to God. I don't believe in arm twisting invitations to adults or children. In fact, I never gave a public invitation for them to respond. I told them that if anyone ever wanted to talk with me about Jesus and what it means to be saved, for them to come and see me and I would be more than happy to talk with them. There were numerous times that children would come and talk with me.

One little fellow told his mother that he had to dress up when he went to VBS because he was going to talk to the preacher about getting saved. There was another time when I was sitting in the fellowship hall eating the evening meal (we also served the evening meal in this VBS) when my wife told me about a little boy who was waiting to talk with me. All the other children in his class were outside playing, but I looked down at the end of the table and this little guy was looking at me, waiting patiently with his head propped up on his hand. As soon as I could finish eating, I had the joy of sharing God's plan of salvation with him.

On another occasion, VBS was dismissed for the evening and a mother with two of her little children was leaving the church when they started talking with my wife. One of the little boys said that he wanted to talk with me and my wife told him that he could come along with his mother to my study because I was still there. He and his mother came back inside the church, sat in my study, and I asked what he wanted to talk about. He looked me in the face and said, "I want you to tell me how I can get Jesus in my heart."

Not too long after I went to this church, a mother brought her little girl to me. She said that she wanted to be bab-a-tized. I did not want to discourage her in the things of God, but neither did I want to baptize a lost child. I explained the plan of salvation to her and tried to explain it the best I could on a child's level. After talking with her, I just trusted the Holy Spirit to do what needed to be done in her little heart. I asked her if she felt like she was ready to be baptized or if she thought that she needed to wait a while. Do you know what she said? Her answer gave evidence of how the Holy Spirit works even in the heart of a little child. She

said that she thought that she needed to wait. Several years later, this same little girl came to me, we talked again, and I had the privilege of baptizing her before I left that church.

When I resigned this pastorate, one of the men remarked to me that he thought the fruits of my ministry would be reaped in years to come. At the time he said that, it didn't dawn on me what he meant, but later I got to thinking about it and I believe that he was referring to the ministry that I had with the children.

“And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.” (Mk. 10:13-16)

Chapter 18

Working With Youth

As I stated earlier at the beginning of my book, I began my full time ministry with Greater Greensboro Youth for Christ. Shortly, thereafter, I also served as part time Youth Director at the church where Ann and I were married. Several years later, I held a staff position in a church that included being the youth director. I've said all of that to say that during my younger years, I was very active in working with youth.

When I went to work with YFC, I was sent to observe how the Charlotte group carried out their activities, hoping that I could bring back some ideas. I had never been in a nightclub in my life. One of the first stops that we made in Charlotte was to a nightclub where they had met the night before in a rented back room. They were going to pick up some sound equipment that had been left. I was not impressed, to say the least, with what I saw or learned during my days of "training." I've always marched to the beat of a different drum, even all the way back to my younger days.

I'll never forget shortly after Ann and I were married that she wanted to have a slumber party for the girls in the Sunday School Class that she taught. We had bought our first little two-bedroom house. Our back yard joined a cemetery. I was cooped up in the bedroom by myself, and the girls were giggling in the living room. I decided to play a prank on them. Covering myself in a sheet with a flash light underneath, I went out into our backyard. I got their attention inside the house and then came up running from the back of the yard (where the cemetery was located). They quit giggling and went to screaming. We all had a good laugh out of it when it was over.

In my first pastorate, we had a great group of young people. In fact, the best group with whom I ever worked. I was young and it seemed like I was sort of like their older brother, but they always treated me with the respect of a pastor. We just had a good close relationship that still exists with several of them after all these many years. While in this first pastorate, we formed the

ritual of planning our own retreats, mostly at the beach. It turned out to be not just for the youth, but for anyone who wanted to attend. Guess what? I never heard the youth object. Moms, dads, and even grandmas went.

My, my, they were good times! When I talk with those folks to this day, we like to reminisce about that good fellowship. Every year, I would print up some rules for the youth that went on the retreats. After several years, I felt like I didn't need to give them any. Besides they never gave me any trouble. Then, several weeks before the retreat began, one of the youth came up to me asking for their sheet of rules. I simply responded that I would get them some. Only one time do I remember a girl trying me. As I said, we went to the beach and didn't permit two piece bathing suits. In fact, the one piece had to cover "all" and be as modest as a bathing suit can be. We had just arrived on one of our retreats when a youth asked me if I had seen what one of the girls had on. I was told, "You're not going to like it." I found one of the lady chaperons and asked her to check into the matter and take care of it. She did and I never saw what the girl was wearing and never said a word to her.

Ann and some of the ladies in the church would plan the retreat meals and Ann and I would do most of the shopping. It turned out to be very economical. Our retreats were a mixture of Bible Study, singing, video lessons, games, recreation, and sometimes we had guest that we invited to speak and teach. There were even times that we would observe the ordinance of the Lord's Supper together and we would always have nightly devotions before the guys and gals would go to their separate quarters for the evening.

From my Youth for Christ days, I learned to do what we called a Human Scavenger Hunt and a Wild Goose Chase. I did these in several of my pastors along with the conducting of retreats. The human scavenger hunt is when youth would divide up in teams and were given a descriptive list of people. They were given an allotted time to go out and bring back their friends fitting the description (such as, someone wearing a blue shirt, or some wearing two different kinds of shoes on each foot, etc.). After a certain period of time, the teams would return to their

original location and the team that gathered the most people meeting their descriptions won a prize. An evangelistic message and a social usually followed.

The Wild Goose Chase was similar, but we had to use a chicken or a duck instead of a goose. We would hide the chicken in a given location, divide the youth up into teams, give them clues to interpret, and send them out to find the chicken. If they properly interpreted the clue, then someone would be there to give them the next clue. We would usually send them all over the city or in various places of the county, but the last clue was the location of the chicken. Once they arrived on the scene, depending on where it was, the chicken was either held in the cage or else released and they had to catch it and put it back in the cage. It was just a fun time for the youth that did the looking as well as for the adults who did the driving and the giving out of the clues.

I continued working with youth in my pastorates until our own children became youth. It was at that time when I dropped back from being so involved. The reason being, I felt like our children needed to be able to do things with the youth of the church without their parents being there to watch everything they did. In other words, give them some degree of freedom. In fact, as our own children grew older, they took it upon themselves to do their own planning of activities. I remember the good job they did in providing alternatives for the children during Halloween (which we did not observe). They would do something like a fall festival theme where the children could come and have a good safe fun time.

Speaking of Halloween, I recall the time when I served as a church youth director and locked horns with some of the adults in the church over having a haunted house. I'm not against children dressing up in cute costumes and having a good time. However, I'm not a proponent for the observance of Halloween. It's my belief that we need to warn our children and youth about the dangers of satanic influence. God's Word is very clear about dabbling in the occult (Deut. 18:9-14). Of all people, Christians should not involve themselves in anything that has to do with heathen practices or overtones. When I voiced my convictions to

this church, I was outvoted, but I did not participate. Years later, someone from that congregation who had opposed my position confessed how they came under conviction and eventually saw the light. Today, more churches recognize the dangers of following Halloween traditions, but back in those days, churches were some of the biggest promoters of it.

In that same church I experienced a youth trip like I'd never had before and never since. When I went to this church as an associate, my duties involved just about anything that the pastor wanted me to do, including even being the church janitor. However, my main role was youth director. They had paid youth directors in the past and I was expecting a top notch youth group. But, did I get a surprise! I'll never forget the day when it came time for a youth outing to the mountains. Before the church bus ever left the parking lot, there were several teenage girls who refused to ride the bus and insisted on riding with their boyfriends in a van. Back in those days, some of you might remember the "love vans" in the hippy movement. Well, that's what it was and I refused to let them go if they didn't ride with us on the church bus. After continuing to argue with me, I marched the "young ladies" into the pastor's study and told him the situation. Being the godly man that he was, he backed me up and told them the same thing. With that they boarded the bus and off we went.

Little did I know that was just the beginning. Shortly into the trip, we had a young teenage boy and girl "getting with it" in front of everybody on the bus. The only reason I was slow in saying something is because the girl's parents were on the bus serving as chaperons. They said nothing to their daughter and just let her and her boyfriend slobber all over each other. With that, I stepped in and put a stop to their behavior.

Later, I remember making one of the boy's put out a cigarette and him giving me a dirty look. We had a good time with most of the kids as well as the parents that went along, but on the way back the rebel rousers gave us something to remember. We stopped at a road-side stand and this bunch loaded up on apple cider. As a result they threw up all over the back of the bus on the way back leaving us with some unpleasant memories.

Chapter 19

The Delivery Room Of Faith

I believe that pastors are to do the “work of an evangelist” (II Tim. 4:5) in the sense of telling the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to the lost. I also believe that being an evangelist and being a pastor are distinct gifts. Pastors are to be the teachers of God’s Word to the church (Eph. 4:11). If a pastor fails to do that, then he fails to be what God has called him to be.

I do not have the gift of evangelism, but God in his grace called me to teach His Word to the Body of Christ. That doesn’t mean I have no concern to see people saved. Salvation of the lost ought to be a concern for every born again believer in Christ.

On numerous occasions down through the years, God has allowed me to share the story of His redeeming grace not only from the pulpit, but one on one with individuals in various places. It’s an unforgettable experience to be in the delivery room of faith when a person professes faith in Jesus Christ. We must remember that God is the One Who does the saving. I’m nothing more than God’s delivery boy who delivers the message of salvation. The Holy Spirit is the One who convicts the heart of sin, grants repentance, and faith to believe. Salvation is of the Lord! Our commission is to tell. God does the saving. There are several stories that I would like to share.

*In this particular church that I pastored, we had Sunday evening services every week, except on fifth Sunday evenings and certain other occasions. It was during the morning service on a fifth Sunday that a lady asked me to come visit her husband and witness to him. She felt like something was going on with him spiritually. That Sunday evening, my wife and I made our way over to their house. After a few minutes of breaking the ice and general conversation, I asked this gentleman if he ever thought about getting saved. How many times I had asked such a question; I cannot begin to number. Most of the time, people would respond that they were not interested. However, when I

asked this gentleman, I was prepared for the normal response, but he did not give me the usual answer.

When I asked if he ever thought about getting saved, he cried out, “YES, AND I WANT TO RIGHT NOW!” My wife and his wife were also casually talking and when they heard what he said, things got quiet. We were all taken by surprise, but it did not take God by surprise. His wife was very observant to know that God was working in his life. The Lord had been preparing his heart and was calling this sinner to profess faith in the risen Christ. I thought that we all were going to have a spell. Not only did he profess Christ, but also he followed through and bears evidence to this day of spiritual transformation.

*There is another story that demonstrates how God works behind the scenes and prepares hearts to hear the Gospel. A couple had been visiting our church services for several weeks. The wife was a member, but inactive. Her husband had been attending with her, but sometimes worked on Sundays. It was on a Sunday when he had to work, that the wife spoke to me as she went out the door from morning service. She asked if I could come over to their house sometime during the week and talk with them. I scheduled a time and the day came for our visit.

When I drove up to their house, something strange immediately happened. The husband, wife, and teenage son all came out of the house to greet me as I got out of the car. It's not everyday that happens. They invited me in the house and after just a few minutes we got down to spiritual business. I sat in one chair, but the three of them clustered around me in a semicircle. This was not done at my suggestion, but their own doings. In the course of our conversation, I was told that the reason they began coming to church is because their teenage son wanted to attend. The wife told me that she was saved, but out of fellowship with God and it was her desire to get back right with God. It was my joy to present the Gospel to her husband and then to their youngest son who both trusted Christ for their salvation.

This couple also had an older son who was not present at the time of my visit. However, he and his girlfriend also began attending the church services. It wasn't very long before both of

them placed their trust in Christ. It was my joy to go with all of them into the baptismal waters and see them grow in the grace of God.

*I'll never forget the visit I made to the home of a couple that had been attending our church services. I remember asking them if they had ever trusted Christ as Lord and Savior. The wife responded that she had and I asked when she did so. She said that several Sundays earlier at the close of a morning service she placed her faith in the Lord Jesus. I share this as a reminder that one does not have to walk an isle to be saved. God's word declares, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). At that time, it was my joy to share the Gospel personally with her husband and to later baptize them both.

*In another pastorate, I witnessed something that I had never seen before. Two elderly gentlemen were saved on two separate occasions. I had never seen anyone of that elderly age converted before. The wives of both these men faithfully attended church services, but neither husband came at all. Allow me to tell you something about each of them. Both cases are similar and involve a stay in the hospital.

The wife informed me, that her husband was in the hospital. As a result, I went to visit him and discovered that he was hard as a rock spiritually. On several different occasions, I tried witnessing to him, but to no avail. Finally, one day I simply told him that I was never again going to mention the Gospel to him unless he wanted to talk about it, then all he had to do was say so. Time went by and I visited with the couple in their home several times. Then, the unexpected came, the wife died very suddenly and I was at the hospital when she was pronounced dead. Her husband and I always got along well and he treated me with the utmost of respect. In fact, more respect than many of my own congregation. All during the funeral, he and the family was nothing but kind to me as I tried to minister to them.

A few years went by and I received a phone call from his daughter. She told me that her dad was in the hospital and had

just been diagnosed with terminal cancer. I made my way to the ICU and found a very weak man. Before I left his room that day, I reminded him of what I said to him previously about not discussing spiritual things unless he wanted me to. His response to me was that he was afraid that it was too late. I reminded him of the dying thief on the cross (Lk. 23:41-43) and told him that it was never too late to trust Christ. With that, he indicated to me that he wanted to hear the Gospel of saving Grace and believe.

What I'm about to tell you cannot adequately be put into words. The next time I paid him a visit, he had been moved out of ICU and into a private room. When I entered his room, I had to do a double take. He looked like a different man! I wondered if I was in the right room. But, then, the Lord reminded me that he was a different man. They brought his lunch, but he was so weak that he couldn't feed himself. Therefore, I fed him and while doing so, his daughter arrived. She also made the comment to me about him looking different. His life was a reminder that "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17). A short time after that, he was moved to a local hospice center where he died. Before his wife's death, she told me about how he had attended church years ago and saw what a hard time the people gave the pastor. He got so disgusted that he never wanted to go back. I believe that I'm going to see him and his precious wife in heaven.

The second episode is similar to the first. Once again, this wife informed me that her husband was in the hospital. I visited with him and left some gospel literature, telling him that I would return in a day or so. Upon my next visit, he was in the midst of being discharged. For those of you who have been in the hospital and know what it's like being discharged, you know that it can be a busy time. I spoke to him and asked if he would like for me to come to his home after being discharged to talk about spiritual things. He looked me in the face and said, "No." He told me that I could come to his home after being discharged, but he was ready to talk about his spiritual need right then and there. What a joy it was to share the Gospel with this hungry soul. He trusted Christ and was discharged from the hospital.

Shortly thereafter, my wife and I visited their home where he informed me that he wanted to be baptized. I explained to him that our baptistery was rather hard to get in and out of, but he insisted that is what he wanted to do. Unfortunately, his condition worsened very quickly and he was never able to attend a service or be baptized. I conducted his funeral service knowing that Christ had done a work of grace in his heart in the closing days of his life.

*I wish that every story that I told were one of people hungering and thirsting after righteousness. As you very well know, that is not the case. More times than not, people to whom I have witnessed have turned a deaf ear to the Gospel. Previously in this chapter, I told about several wives who had a spiritual burden for their husbands. There is another wife who wanted me to witness to her husband. I shared with him the Gospel and he become so angry with me that he stormed out of the room uttering all kinds of disgusting remarks. Occasionally, he would attend church services with his wife, but to my knowledge remains hard as a rock. Only God can soften his soul and give him a “heart of flesh” (Ezek. 11:19). Let me say at this point, that pastors are not the only ones that God has called to share the Gospel and witness. I remember hearing a preacher tell of a church member who wanted him to go witness to a neighbor. The preacher’s response was, “I’m not going to do it that is your job.” Every Christian is called to be a witness, but I also know that some of the hardest people to talk with about Christ are family members.

*One of the saddest witnessing encounters I ever had took place in the hospital at Chapel Hill, NC. A lady in my pastorate asked me to visit a man who was dying from leukemia. I made my way to his room and had to garb up with hospital gown, mask, and all in order to enter his room. He was a very sick man with not many days left to live. As I entered the room, I introduced myself and tried to get acquainted. After a bit, I attempted to share the Gospel with him. He informed me that he was a church member in a Baptist Church in the eastern part of

the state. He also told me that he had a son in Hell and wanted to go to Hell and be with his son. This man was not speaking delusional, but meant what he was saying. I pleaded with him, but to no avail. He's the only person that I can remember actually telling me that he wanted to die and go to Hell. I've seen people live like it and act like it, but he verbalized it. Unless God broke through that hard heart sometime after my departure, he got his dying wish and suffers in Hell to this day and for all eternity.

*Hell is for real. I don't know what Hell is like and I'm thankful that because of God's Grace upon me that I'll never have to find out. I don't know how much that is taught in God's Word about Hell is figurative and how much is literal, but this one thing I do know, Hell is a real place of eternal torment for all lost souls outside of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Those who teach otherwise are full of heresy. I remember a young man who grew up in "church" all his life and with whom I graduated from high school. After only one semester in a well know denominational university, he told me that he learned in his religion class that there was no such place as Hell. It was only a figment of ones imagination. Years later I was told that he moved to the West Coast of the United States and died with AIDS. Unless he came to know the Lord Jesus as His Savior and Master before his death, then I'm afraid he has learn just how real the torment of Hell really is. In fact, Hell will be full of religious people. People, who grew up in an institutionalized church, walked an aisle, said a sinner's prayer, got baptized, and joined up. I remember telling one young man that Hell was going to be full of Baptist. He was surprised that I made such a statement and wanted to know why I would say such a thing. My reply was "because there are so many of them." Being a Baptist or bearing any other denominational tag will not get you to Heaven. It's like Jesus told Nicodemus, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jh. 3:3). Without the new birth by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, one will never know Heaven as their eternal home in glory.

*While pastoring a rural church, I often traveled many miles to make hospital visits in another town. On this particular day, I didn't have any church members to visit, but two elderly ladies knocked at the door of the parsonage and asked if I could take them to this hospital to visit a relative. I don't remember all the details about why they needed transportation, but what I do remember is God's providence in putting me at that hospital at that particular time.

I transported these two ladies to the hospital and led them to the lobby. After they made their visit, they were to meet me back in the lobby. While I was waiting there, someone came up to me and asked if I was a minister and if I would visit a dying man. I was informed that he was of a bad temperament, he didn't like preachers, and that he might curse me out. But, these friends of his were concerned about his soul and asked if I would pay him a visit. Now, I didn't like the thoughts of being cussed and thrown out of the room, but off I went praying for God's strength. As I knocked on the door and entered, I must confess that I saw a sight like I had never seen before. This man was a drunk, dying with cirrhosis of the liver. I had never seen a belly as swollen in my life and his yellowish color was worse than terrible.

I witnessed to this man and he never was hostile towards me. He did not indicate that he trusted Christ, but he listened and let me share the Gospel. I don't remember how many more times I went back to visit him, but I remember the last time that I entered his room and found the bed empty. Immediately, I thought that he had died. After inquiring at the nurse's station, I found out that he had been discharged. I never knew exactly where he lived, but much to my surprise, one day I received a card from him thanking me for my visits. Only God knows whatever happened to this man, but I tried to be faithful in telling the story of God's saving grace. It's not our job to save any soul, but to proclaim the Gospel and depend upon the Holy Spirit to call out God's elect. We're nothing but seed sowers. Only God can cause the seed to germinate, take root, and bring to fruition.

There are no magic verses to use in sharing the Gospel. If the Holy Spirit is working, the Lord can use whatever verses of

God's Word that He so chooses. Some verses that I suggest using in presenting God's plan of salvation are as follows:

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;”
(Rom. 3:23)

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23)

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (Jh. 3:16)

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (II Cor. 5:21)

“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (Lk. 13:3)

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9)

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,”
(Acts 16:31)

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved ... For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation ... For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved ... So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Rom. 10:9-10, 13, 17)

I don't know how many people to whom I have witnessed trusted Christ as their Lord and Savior. There is no way that I can unzip the heart and see inside, but I do believe there will be

spiritual fruit that will give evidence of new birth. I don't know how many people of whom I wrote about in this chapter really meant business with God, but God knows.

Our commission to evangelize is not to convert people to Christ, but to tell the story of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our job is to do the telling and God's job is to do the saving. I've repeated this several times because we constantly need to be reminded. If you can talk someone into "making a decision," another person can talk them out of it. We're nothing but seed sowers. We cannot make the seed take root, grow, and produce. All I can tell you is that the "elect" (I Pet. 1:2, Eph. 1:4-14, Jh. 1:12-13, Jh. 17:2-3) of God to whom I have witnessed and told the Gospel were converted to Christ and gloriously saved. Since we don't know who the "elect" are, we are to preach the gospel to every person and let God call them out of the world (Matt. 28:19-20).

I'm afraid much, of what passes for evangelism today, is of man and we have filled our churches with unregenerate people. Have you noticed how easy it is for people to join up with the average church of today? It's actually a big joke. Church membership is taken very lightly. Most congregations are so numbers hungry that they'll take anything and everything without close examination of regeneration. To the best of our ability, we need to question prospective church members concerning their new birth in Jesus Christ. The starting place to being a member of a local church is being "born again" (Jh. 3:3). We realize that at our very best, there will be some tares to creep in among the wheat, but we need to beware of this and place a strong emphasis on a regenerate church membership.

Chapter 20

She Wrote Dirty Letters

Back in the days when people communicated by postal mail, it was not uncommon to retrieve a letter from the mailbox that a friend or loved one who lived a distance away had written to you. It's possible that you have received a letter containing bad news. Perhaps you've even received a letter where the person had a disagreement with you and said some derogatory things to get them off their chest. Have you ever received an anonymous letter? I'm not talking about one of those dumb "chain letters," but a letter that said nasty things and the person didn't have the "guts" to sign it.

In one of my pastorates, I received several unsigned letters that attacked my immediate family and various members of my church family. At first, I basically paid no attention to them; although, I didn't like what was said. I remembered what a pastor told me when I first entered the ministry about trouble in the church. He said the more you stir it the more it stinks. I didn't want to be the one guilty of stirring the stink. However, I soon discovered that there are some people who love to stir stink in the church and they will keep stirring it until stopped.

There was a couple visiting the church about this time and a comment was made by the husband that they had received an anonymous letter pertaining to the church trying to discourage them from joining. Once they made mention of this, then another church member said they also had received one. It was at this point that we discovered various individuals had received anonymous letters, but like me, didn't want to say anything about it. In these letters, different members of the church were viciously attacked. People who were strong supporters of me, my family, and my pastorate came under the gun. The cat was now out of the bag, so to speak, and I could no longer ignore the problem. Ignoring a problem, hoping that it will go away, will not make it go away. Like cancer that attacks the body, it must be dealt with or else it will eventually suck the life out of the body. Church discipline is not enjoyable, but it is biblical and must be

done according to Scripture. God makes it perfectly clear that one of the things he hates is “he that soweth discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:19).

I’m sure that those reading this book will have their own way of dealing with such issues, but I’m one that doesn’t believe in sweeping problems under the rug. If that is done, they’ll just come out later to haunt you. To begin with, I set out to find the guilty person who was behind the dirty letter writing campaign. We didn’t want to accuse the wrong person. That would make a bad matter worse. If we didn’t know what we were doing or talking about, then no action could be taken. I never dreamed at the beginning of this ordeal where it was going to lead or what the outcome might be.

We employed the services of three professional handwriting experts from three different cities. One was retired from the FBI, one had ties with the State of North Carolina, and the third was an individual who did it as a profession. I collected handwriting samples from people that I suspicioned were capable of such behavior. All three handwriting experts identified the same individual as being the woman who wrote the dirty letters. In fact, one of the experts talked with me at some length and gave me some suggestions as to how to handle this in the church. Unfortunately, he had dealt with this type thing within churches previously and I found his advice very helpful.

Finally, the day came when the process of confrontation was inevitable. To begin with, our desire as the body of Christ was to protect the church and hopefully see repentance from the sinning sister. We first met with her and her husband at which time all the evidence was presented in a private setting with only her, her husband, a witness, and me present. She denied everything and refused to repent. Our next step was for those of whom she wrote about in the letters to confront her. A Sunday afternoon meeting was planned at which time everything was exposed and everyone concerned was present. The evidence was presented and she continued to deny her actions and refused to repent. It was at this time that she was informed of the consequences. She was told that unless she repented, she would be removed from the membership of the church. Even if there was repentance, she

would be expected to reimburse the church all that had been spent in the investigation of her actions. She would also have to step down from her position in the choir and from teaching her children's Sunday School class until a time of healing had occurred.

I'm sad to report that she refused to repent and was informed that disciplinary action against her would be taken in the Sunday evening service that night. Following the afternoon meeting she and her husband went home and returned for the evening service. I can only describe the service like a funeral. It was not a happy time. Hearts were broken, but we were doing what God's Word tells us to do in times of turmoil within the church (Matt. 18:15-17). Matters against her were brought before the church and she was voted out of fellowship with the congregation. Her husband stated that he also wanted to be removed from membership. We felt like he was aware of his wife's actions all along, but could not prove his involvement.

In the midst of this act of discipline, the woman who wrote the dirty letters had her opportunity to speak. She marched to the front of the church and laid money on the communion table. It was enough to cover our expenses in hiring the handwriting experts. But, she declared that the returned money was what the church had recently given her for some medical expenses.

It was not the outcome that anyone wanted. If I could have written the end of the story, my desire would have been for her to confess her sin, repent, and be restored to fellowship with the church. But, life is not ideal and it does not always turn out the way we want it. After this episode, we found out that this same woman had pulled the same prank of writing dirty letters in two other churches. We were not aware of that until after we removed her and her husband from membership in our local assembly. It was not a happy day when we dealt with this woman, who wrote dirty letters, but it was necessary and if I had to, I'd do it all over again in order to protect the testimony of the church. I'm afraid one reason why the church has lost its testimony in the world is because of sin in the camp. I've preached for years that there is so much of the world in the church that you can't even tell that the church is in the world.

For the most part, our church pulpits have departed the expository teaching of God's Word where the doctrines of Holy Scripture are being expounded to the people of God. When a church practices doctrine, people think it strange when in reality, it is strange for a church not to put into practice the teachings of Scripture. Before the above issue was ever dealt with in the church, I tried to deal with it from the pulpit. It was my prayer that God would bring conviction to this troubled soul and that we would never have to bring it to the church.

The summer after the dirty letters starting arriving, we were on vacation at the beach. While there, we were playing a Bible game with our children. It was at that time when I got the idea to preach a sermon on Jezebel from First Kings 21:1-29. I titled it, "A Wicked Woman Who Wrote Dirty Letters." That sermon was followed by another one entitled, "When The Dogs Licked Their Chops", from First Kings 22:34-40, and Second Kings 9:21-37. My desire was for God to work in such a way from His Word so as to bring conviction upon the sinner and there would be repentance. Unfortunately, there was no favorable response to the Word when it was preached or when it was used in the exercise of church discipline.

How many times have you heard of a church practicing discipline on a wayward church member? One who deliberately and willfully continues to live in sin and defy God? I don't believe that we're to go around acting like a spiritual policeman, trying to find every little flaw in professing believers. No Christian has reached a state of perfection and we're all filled with flaws. That is where growth in grace is necessary for every believer. We call that sanctification. The main focus of our ministry is not to act like a hunter looking for someone whom we can charge with an offense. However, if and when necessary, sin must be confronted and dealt with in a congregation if we're going to practice the teachings of Holy Scripture. The purpose and goal of church discipline is not retaliation, but restoration and reconciliation of the sinning offender to fellowship with God and the church. In order to protect the integrity of a local church, we must not be afraid to do what Scripture admonishes us to do if the occasion calls for it.

Chapter 21

The Man With The Ball Bat

Before accepting the pastorate of one church, the pastor search committee informed me of a rather serious financial situation that recently occurred in the church. The congregation was debt free and had invested their savings in a local finance company owned and operated by a church member. Fortunately, the church did some remodeling, which included a costly refurbishing of the steeple, and they took a rather large sum from their savings to pay for the work. However, there was still over \$33,000.00 remaining in their savings.

Shortly after spending some of their savings, the church received notice that the finance company was in trouble. Their funds were not insured and they were aware of that from the very beginning. However, the owner was one of their “good” church members whom they trusted. He was trusted so much that several members of the congregation also placed rather large sums in this company. There was a total of more than \$378,000.00 invested from different families within the church besides the church savings.

When word was received that all this money was lost, there were a lot of unhappy campers to say the least. That is what I walked into when I accepted the call as their pastor. To be honest, I didn't want to take that pastorate from the very beginning, but after seeking God's will, I felt that is what He wanted me to do. After becoming their pastor, I was aware of the hard feelings over the financial issue. The man who owned the finance company no longer attended. I preached a lot on forgiveness and tried to do what I could from the Word of God to promote healing.

Eventually, I did meet the man and his wife who had lied about the financial condition of the company and then eventually went broke. His mother was still a member of the church and she also lost money in the deal. Her health was failing and she was unable to attend services. During one of my visits with her, I met her son and on several occasions I talked with him. I'll never

forget discussing the financial concerns of the situation and asking him if he had ever thought of coming before the church and asking forgiveness. You know what he said? He said, “NO,” he had never given it any thought. I suggested that he do so, but it never happened.

There was one particular man in the church who had invested his money in this company and lost a considerable amount. He was elderly in age and gave the appearance of being wealthy and distinguished. I was told that he was spit firing mad. So much so that he carried a ball bat in his car, waiting for the day when he could use it on the financial proprietor who had squandered and lost his hard earned money. One Sunday I saw him come limping into church all bruised up. I didn't know what happened to him. Whether you know it or not, the pastor is usually the last one to find out what's happening. I inquired about his condition and found out that he had gone to a car wash several days before and got his wish. Guess who was at the car wash? It was his enemy who had stolen his money. Honestly, I don't recall if he used his ball bat, but the two of them got into a hand to hand scuffle and ended up before the magistrate.

I didn't see what the crook looked like after the man with the ball bat finished with him. There was probably about twenty years difference in their ages, but the old codger harbored so much hatred in his heart that he just couldn't let it go. He loved his money more than his reputation. The last I heard about these two men, is that the oldest man was in a nursing home and the thief had died. He was accidentally burnt while being transported to Duke Hospital. The people in the church who had lost their money were in hopes that he would sue the hospital so they could sue him and retrieve their funds. I never heard anybody say anything about these souls getting right with God.

Personally, what I think both of these men needed, as well as many of these church members, was a good dose of salvation. By the time the Lord moved me to another pastorate, the church had recovered from their financial loss, but they never saw things from a spiritual perspective. Everywhere that I pastored, it seems like God put me there for a remnant. This church was no exception.

Chapter 22

Trips To Foreign Soil

I've not done a great deal of traveling outside the United States, but God has granted me several opportunities to do so. I'll never forget my first time, which involved my first airline travel. Our children were all small, and our youngest was just a baby. A missionary friend wanted me to go with him to Haiti where he served for a number of years. I wasn't going to do any actual mission work on this trip, but observe and see what God was doing on the field. This missionary wanted me to consider becoming a part of his mission organization and work with him. He was getting older and was looking for some help. That was the purpose of the trip. To pray and seek God's will.

While making plans for the trip, Satan struck fear in my heart, telling me, that if I got on the plane going to Haiti, I would never again see my wife and children. You say, how do you know that it was the devil? Because, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Tim. 1:7). God's Word also says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (I Jh. 4:18). I took God at His Word and the Lord taught me some valuable lessons on that trip.

The missionary was well known in Haiti and he told me that I didn't need a passport. He could get me in and out of the country without one. Well, have you ever done anything stupid? I believed him and trusted him, but after what I experienced in Haiti, I learned that regardless how much I trusted a human being, I would never again leave this country without a passport. After being stopped at several checkpoints throughout the country, the Lord taught me that if I could trust my life to some mortal man in a foreign country, then why couldn't I trust Him (my Almighty Sovereign Creator, Heavenly Father, and Savior of my soul) to take care of me regardless of where I found myself in the circumstances of life.

There are many things about the trip that I'll never forget, but what sticks in my mind more than anything else is when we took

about a two hour trip back into the interior to a place called Saut Eau. I was told that it was the voodoo capitol of the world. While there, Pastor Joseph led me up a tall hill and showed me a Catholic/Voodoo altar that both groups used for their sacrifices. I was told that one could not tell the difference between the two in Haiti. The lostness of so many people was heartbreaking.

After returning from that trip, I continued for several years to ponder the thought of working with that mission organization. However, the more I sought the will of God, the more I felt it was not the direction He wanted me to take. However, that first trip abroad, even though it was not that far from the United States, was an eye-opening experience to a third world country. I realized just how blessed we are in America in more ways than one. Most of all, God taught me how to trust Him and to beware of what people tell you. By the way, I did get in and out of Haiti without any trouble, but those piercing eyes of the law looked holes through me more times than one before I left the country. Those glazing penetrating stares sizing me up were enough to teach me the importance of a passport while visiting foreign soil.

In a previous chapter of this book (see Chapter on My Schooling), I made reference to me participating in an evangelistic crusade to the Republic of South Korea with Dr. James Talbert. Actually, I had the privilege of joining Brother James on two crusades to South Korea back in the early 1980's. The first crusade is when he made it possible for me to complete my higher education that I write about in chapter six. On that crusade, I preached several times at the Bal-Um Presbyterian Church, at a bus terminal that provided schooling for their employees, and at a wig factory. The second trip is when God gave me opportunity to preach to the masses in high schools, to a group of prisoners, and in the U-Am Presbyterian Church in Chung Ju City.

Only eternity will reveal the outcome of those sermons, but I'm grateful for the privilege of being a Seed sower of God's precious Word. God blessed me as a result of those opportunities and I'll always treasure the memory of those trips.

In 1994, Ann and I took our first and only trip to the Holy Land. We were able to get a good price with it being a pastor's

familiarization tour. Our trip included such places as, the outdoor Roman Theater along the Mediterranean Coast, ruins of the ancient Roman Capitol at Caesarea, the aqueduct water system that was built by Herod the Great in 22 BC, Megiddo, the ruins of Solomon's stables, Mary's well at Nazareth, the Jordan River, Gadara, Capernaum, the Mt. Of Beatitudes, the Sea of Galilee, Caesarea Phillipi, Jericho, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Calvary, Qumram, Masada, and the Dead Sea. It was wonderful to visit the land where our Lord lived and walked in the flesh while upon earth. But, the most important thing is to walk with Him today in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Land is a good place to visit for historical purposes, but I personally don't believe that it holds any special spiritual significance for the future, except the need to evangelize the lost who live there. Jesus was very clear when He said, "my kingdom is not of this world" (Jh. 18:36).

I believe God's people ought to be mission minded. The Great Commission is very clear, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19-20). Someone has said that you cannot spell the word Gospel without the word "Go."

I remember asking one church that I pastored if they would allow a group of people, who were of foreign descent, to use our church facilities. From what I was told, these people were looking for a church in which to conduct their worship services. We had plenty of room; therefore the lack of space was no problem. I must tell you that this church took up an annual offering for Lottie Moon, which is the Southern Baptist Christmas Offering for foreign missions. However, when I asked if they would allow this group of foreign brothers and sisters to use part of our church building, do you know what they said? They said, "We don't want anybody like that messing up our church." That church is dying and do I have to tell you why?

Chapter 23

Death Threat

Have you ever had anyone tell you that they were going to kill you? Honestly! I'm not talking about kidding with you or playing a prank, but a real death threat? It's one of those things that you'll never forget. Let me tell you about when it happened to me.

The church that I pastored received a request from a pregnant unmarried teenager for assistance. I asked a friend to go along with me as we made our way to her home. She was living with her parents in an apartment and the girl was not home at the time of our visit. Her mother welcomed us into their home and proceeded to give me a list of numerous items that they expected from us. I told her that we wouldn't be able to furnish everything on the list, but we would certainly do as much as possible and we would see to it that the baby's needs were met. The conversation was between the mother and me because the expectant teen never showed up. I don't know what the mother told her daughter when she arrived home. All I know is what happened next.

After I got back to the parsonage, I received a phone call from the pregnant teenager. She was mad. I could say furious or upset, but mad is a better description. She was mad like a rabid dog. When I answered the phone, she immediately told me that she was going to such and such an address on such and such a street and kill me and my entire family because we were not going to meet her every demand on her list. What she didn't realize is with that phone call, she lost all possibilities of ever being helped by our congregation. A dead man certainly can't help anyone, but regardless of what happened to me, we were not going to have any more to do with a person in such a state of mind.

To be honest with you, I felt pity for her in more ways than one, but God was teaching me that there are some people that you just can't help regardless of how hard you try. Let me tell you how I felt when she threatened to kill my family and me. That was the first and only time that I've ever had anyone to

actually say those words to me. It caused me to stop and think that this person could be crazy enough to do such a thing. I decided that I wasn't going to have anything else to do with the situation and was going to trust my God to protect us.

Before closing the telling of this episode, I must tell you this. When she said that she was going to come to such and such an address on such and such a street at a given time of day, it was the correct street, but the wrong address. We didn't live at the house number that she quoted. I hoped that she wouldn't show up at the wrong house and do the wrong people in; however, to carry out her threat upon anyone was more serious than we wanted to imagine. Sometimes crazy people do crazy things and carry out such threats. I knew that we needed to beware of her and fortunately, we never heard from her or her family again.

God's protective hand has been upon my family and me more times than I will ever know. I'll never forget the time that Ann and I were out on church visitation when she was pregnant with our first child. As we were getting ready to leave the house where we were visiting, she slipped and fell on the front steps. That scared the life out of me, but she got up and said that she was unhurt. So many times I've thought about that episode and thanked God for not allowing any injury to her or to our unborn child. It was one of those frightening experiences that made me stop and count my blessings.

Another such time was when our daughter was just a toddler before the days of automobile child restraints. I went out to move the church van and she wanted to go with me. We were just going to move the van from one spot to another in the church parking lot and I placed her in the front passenger seat. I didn't drive the van often and didn't realize how badly the brakes grabbed. When I started the van, Julie stood up in the seat and the first time I applied the brakes, she went head first down into the floorboard. What scared me so much is that she went down on her head and when I looked down and saw her head bent to the side, the first thing I thought about was a broken neck. My heart sank. Immediately, I picked her up and praised the Lord that no harm had been done. This was one time that I was thankful for her hard head.

When our second child, Stuart, was born he was a little too anxious about getting out of the womb and inhaled prematurely. This caused a serious condition and I'll never forget arriving at the hospital to visit my wife when I found her upset. She informed me that the doctor had just told her that our little baby boy had to be transported to the pediatric ICU at another hospital in the same town. I looked out the window about that time and saw the ambulance taking him. I remember going to that hospital every day and standing in the hall, looking through the glass window, and praying. That's all I could do was pray. At that time, neither Ann nor I could even touch him. After ten days, Ann was allowed to hold our son. He continued to rapidly improve and we brought him home thirteen days after he was born. God spared his life for which we praised the Lord. Some children in that condition didn't live, but God, in His sovereignty, gave him life.

I don't know how many "scares" our youngest son gave us, but it was certainly more than one. I remember when he left a nick in the table next to our sofa. Wilson was just a toddler when he fell and hit his mouth on the end table. He rammed his front little baby tooth up into his gum. I'll never forget how that looked when I picked him up in my arms, blood and all. I believe that it scared Ann and me worse than it did him. All I knew is that he needed immediate attention, but I didn't know which way to turn. But God! How many times can we say, "But God?" God moved onto the scene and we called a pediatric dentist in town that told us to bring him to the office as soon as possible. Ann was preparing the evening meal when this accident happened and the office was about to close. In fact, it might have already been closed, but the dentist was still there. We immediately took him and God used that dentist to do a magnificent job. A couple of years later, he was playing in the backyard when he got hit in the mouth with the swing. This time, he knocked the same tooth out. Since it was a baby tooth, it remained out waiting for the permanent one to come in.

We always made it a habit to visit our parents at Christmas even when we lived a good ways off. On this one particular trip, we were traveling back home when all of a sudden a frightening

thing happened. We were traveling on a long slight incline when all of a sudden the car coming toward us in the opposite direction, crossed the centerline, and headed directly in our path. We could see the person's head bent down on their steering wheel. You must remember as I tell this story that all of this happened in a matter of seconds. Immediately, I sounded my horn and hit the right shoulder of the road in our little Chevy Chevette. The car heading toward us, came into our lane, and after it passed, I looked in my rear view mirror from the shoulder of the road, and saw the head of the driver come up and then the car return into its proper lane and keep going. I only assumed that the person went to sleep at the wheel and woke up. All I know is how close we came to serious accident or even death. My entire family could have been wiped out if it had not been for God's intervention. When I recall this episode, it just seems like God sent His guardian angels (Heb. 1:14) to move our car to the side of the road and protect us with his sheltering hand. This was just another time of praise for God's protection from the dangers of life.

In that same little Chevy Chevette, Julie and I had gone to Wednesday night service. One or both of the boys were sick and Ann had to keep them at home. While traveling home from church service that night, a man pulled out in front of me in his plumbing truck and we had a wreck. It was raining and the man probably couldn't see well, but he wanted to blame me for hitting him. Thankfully, his wife who was with him, admitted that it was his fault. The most important thing is that no one was injured, but it did render our car undriveable and it had to be towed away. The highway patrolman found out that I was a pastor and after filling out his paper work, he wanted to talk with me about some personal problems that he was having. I don't know if I said anything to help him or not, but maybe that is the reason for the wreck. All I know is that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). The car should have been totaled, but the insurance company didn't want to do it. They ended up spending more money on the car in repairs than what it was worth, and we

were furnished a rental which came in mighty handy because we only had that one vehicle.

Another time, Julie was in a wreck with her grandmother Tolley. Thankfully, Julie was not hurt, but Mrs. Tolley was injured and taken to the hospital. Actually, in keeping with Rom. 8:28, it was discovered that Mrs. Tolley had gallstones which led to them being removed and to her improved health.

I've already shared in the previous chapter (see chapter on Trips To Foreign Soil) about the fear that I had to face and overcome in my first airplane flight to Haiti. I've also written about my evangelistic crusades that I took with Brother James Talbert to the Republic of South Korea in the early 1980's (see chapter on My Schooling). What I want to tell you now concerns our plane trip for the first Korean crusade. I arrived at the Greensboro terminal and found my two traveling companions having coffee and acting like they were in no hurry. I was the inexperienced flyer and was certainly not going to tell them how to board a plane. To make a long story short, the plane took off and we missed the scheduled departure. Brother James found out that if we hurried to Winston-Salem, we could catch a flight that would put us back on track.

We hurried to the Winston-Salem airport and boarded the plane. As the door of the plane was about to be shut, Brother James looked at Carl and me and asked if we had our passports. It was at that time, Carl realized that he left his passport at his home in Durham. He jumped up from his seat and ran out of the plane before the door was sealed. As he ran down the aisle of the plane, James shouted for him to try and make arrangements for another flight the next day.

As Carl made his exit from the plane, Brother James looked at me and asked if I was thinking the same thing that he was thinking to which I responded; "I think so." We were wondering if God got Carl off that plane and left us on for the purpose of our demise. Neither of us was afraid to die, but we also have a desire to live for as long as God wills. We both agreed to pray and seek God's will and by the time we arrived in Seattle, we would try to determine what God wanted us to do about flying across the Pacific. We prayed and when we got to Seattle,

Brother James asked me how I felt about the situation and I said that I thought we should proceed with the crusade. He said that he felt the same way and off we went to South Korea where we had a wonderful time of sharing the Gospel. By the way, let's not forget Rom. 8:28. If we had not missed that flight out of Greensboro, then Carl would have been in a real pickle. The way everything worked out, he went home, got his passport, and by the grace of God was able to re-schedule his flight the next day and was only a day late arriving for the crusade. God's protective hand was upon us and we trusted him regardless of what was to be and God proved Himself faithful and gave us peace in the midst of our anxiety.

The next year, Carl and I were asked by Brother James to take our second trip to South Korea. The year before, the three of us along with several others, took part in a similar Korean crusade. However, this time, Brother James was having difficulty in getting people to take another trip because of a recent incident that happened in the sky. A Russian fighter plane had shot down a Korean airliner. Since Carl and I had been the year before, we had everything needed for this second trip and we both agreed to go. None of us liked the thought of getting shot down, but we believed God was in control and were going to trust Him with our very lives. If we can trust Jesus with our souls for all eternity, then why not trust him with our lives for this short little span of time upon earth.

We'll never know on this side of eternity, how many times God has held us in His protective hand and kept us safe from the storms of life. I've only shared a few of those times that come to my memory. Regardless of what life throws at us, I'm so very thankful to my Heavenly Father for watching over His children with such love. His "grace is sufficient" (II Cor. 12:19) for all situations and circumstances of life. When it comes time to close my eyes in death, it too shall be a glorious experience to open my eyes on the other side and see Jesus. Death for the Christian is not a sad and gloomy experience, but a day of celebrating our heavenly homegoing. Until that day comes, I want to live and serve my Lord and trust him to take care of me each step of this pilgrim journey.

“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.” (Deut. 33:27)

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” (Ps. 46:1)

“The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” (Ps. 46:11)

Chapter 24

High Expectations And Low Pay

Perhaps you've heard it said by churches, "Lord you keep our pastor humble, we'll keep him poor." Generally speaking, most churches pay pastors better today than what they did many years ago. However, the majority of pastors remain underpaid. For every one pastor who makes an adequate salary, you'll find hundreds who don't. The majority of churches have less than 100 people in attendance; therefore, the income is less, which makes fewer funds available to pay the pastor. Most of the churches that I pastored were numerically small in size. However, I discovered that often, the smaller the congregation, the more demanding the church was of their pastor. In a larger church, the pastor has more people that can help him shoulder the load.

There are some large ministerial salaries being paid today, but for the most part, it's not the norm. A man should never adjust his preaching or spiritual convictions in order to keep or protect his paycheck. I did draw a "salary" from the churches that I pastored; however I consider the work of genuine Christian ministry beyond human value. In other words, it is "priceless." I've been asked, "What I charged," for such services as weddings and funerals. I never "charged" anything for whatever I did in my ministry. What I did, I did as unto the Lord with the intent to be a blessing to others and not for personal profit. Let me say at this point, that I do not condemn those who have a different policy than mine. I'm just sharing the policy under which I ministered.

In the beginning days of my ministry, seldom did I receive any honorariums for funerals. As time went by, it became more common for people to give me a financial token for doing them. When it came to weddings, once again, I never "charged" for my services. For those outside of my pastorate, I would take whatever they wanted to offer and sometimes, depending on the circumstances, I would take nothing at all. For those who were members of my pastorate, I would usually tell them to keep whatever they offered as my gift to them. I am reminded of the joke about the preacher who completed the marriage ceremony

of a young couple. The groom asked what he owed the preacher for the ceremony to which the preacher replied, “Whatever it’s worth to you.” The young groom reached in his pocket and pulled out a quarter then handed it to the preacher. The preacher lifted up the bride’s wedding veil, took a peek, and then handed the groom back twenty cents.

When it came to “salary,” some churches paid me better than others and some did the very best they could. You can’t ask for a church to do more than what their resources will allow. I didn’t enter the ministry for financial gain. Most ministers don’t and shame on those who do. Money or salary should never influence how a man preaches. A man of God ought to proclaim God’s Word without fear of how it will affect his compensation. Upon answering the call to preach, I realized that my income would be less than average, but I trusted my Lord to take care of me and my family and He always did.

I’ll never forget the church that I tried to start back in my early days of ministry. After only several years we decided to disband, but those who attended were extremely good to me. Very generously, they gave me a salary for an extended period of time after we disbanded. They also gave me money to take a trip to the Holy Land. As time went by, I had to use that money to live and pay bills. Later, I tried to honor their desire for that trip. My plans were to someday go to the Holy Land, which I eventually did. Their designated money was used some years down the road (once I was able to save the amount) to pay for my wife’s way to the Holy Land when a church that I later pastored offered to pay for mine.

The thing that hurts so much is the attitude that some church people have when it comes to pastoral compensation. Regardless of how much or how little the pastor is paid, it’s too extravagant. In most of my pastorates, by the time you figure the number of hours that were expected and the time that I worked, then my pay would figure out to be on the low side (in some cases minimum wage or lower). In fact, I had a man in one of my pastorates come up to me and say that he didn’t see how in the world we could live off of what the church paid me. To my knowledge he

never said a word to anyone else about giving me a salary increase.

That congregation gave me few raises in the years that I was there. But, one year they did pay for me to go to the Holy Land when I was able to secure a very low “special” rate. That is when I paid for my wife to go with me which was more than the pastor’s cost. When I first went to this church, I was promised that they would take care of my monthly health insurance. I’ll never forget the surprise of my life, when the deacons wanted to meet soon after my arrival to discuss the paying of that premium. I thought that was resolved before my coming. After this bunch of authorities strutted their stuff and demonstrated who was in charge, they agreed to pay it for which I was most appreciative.

What made this a sensitive issue with me is that the church that I just left refused to give me a salary raise because my health insurance increased. It had been a nasty business meeting in that church, but God sent blessings beyond measure to compensate. Those business meetings were so ugly that I didn’t want to ever moderate another one. When I changed pastorates, I informed them accordingly, but they insisted that their business meetings were not bad. I told them that I would do the moderating, but if I ever detected a mean spirit, I was going to shut down the meeting. If they wanted to continue, then they could get somebody else to moderate. I made up my mind that I would never again be a part of an ugly meeting of any kind. I was not going to subject neither myself nor my family to such behavior. Not only did I inform them of my position, but every church that I pastored thereafter. We’ve had to deal with some difficult matters in business meetings, but I’ve never moderated an ugly one since. Because of some bad experiences from the past, I always hated business meetings. It simply brought back too many bad memories. Some of which dealt with my very livelihood.

I never remember pastoring a church where I was assured a salary increase every year. Sometimes I received a cost of living raise, but most of the time I didn’t. Some churches would occasionally give a raise, but I served one church a total of six years and never saw a penny increase. In fact, I took a loss. Not only did I take a loss in the fact that the cost of living went up,

but also several years I absorbed the increase in my health insurance. I did this until it jumped so high that I finally asked the finance committee if they would absorb the increase. If so, then I would appreciate it. Each time I asked, which I believe was twice, they did so. It would have made me feel so much better if they had done it on their own without me having to ask.

In that same church, I had a chairman of the finance committee tell me that I should be rewarded for the amount of money that I had saved the church. But, that was the end of it. No reward and no salary increase. In fact, that same church cost me my first years Christmas gift because of shoddy bookkeeping by the church secretary. When I arrived on the scene, I discovered that the church budget was not detailed and money could be drawn from wherever the powers that be wanted it drawn from. I had the finance committee work on the budget the next year so that the congregation could have full understanding when it came to the disclosure of funds.

Instead of seeing how much most of my pastorates could do for me, most saw how little they could get by with, even when it came to time off and vacation days. Every church that I served gave me at least a week or two weeks vacation within my first year, except for one church that gave NO vacation time for the first full year. They almost worked me to death. I remember sitting at my desk after being at that church for nine months and asking myself why I physically felt so bad. As I was pondering that very thought, I gazed over my desk calendar in front of me and realized that I had not taken a day off for a month.

Soon after this, I made a comment to the chairman of the deacons that I was going to take my days off. The church constitution stated that the pastor was to have one and a half days off per week. I don't know how they figured that, but I'll leave the half-day to your discretion. Little did I know what this chairman was about to do! He was a good man who was trying to look out for the pastor.

In our next deacon's meeting, he said that he felt like the pastor needed a vacation and asked the deacons to grant me a week off. (Here is an example of the deacon board concept) When he said that, you could have heard a pin drop. We were all

sitting at a long table with deacons on both sides. At first, no one said a word, and then the man sitting directly across from me, did not look at me, but at the chairman, and said, "Tell him to take a day off." I had no idea that the chairman was going to make this recommendation, but his intentions were noble. However, with the remarks of this deacon and the silence of the rest burnt me up. I turned and looked every one of those men in the face and I told them that "from this point on, somebody was going to be controlling my time and they were looking at the guy who was going to do it." That was not the last time that I had to tangle with those deacons about vacation. About a year later, a deacon wanted to give me an extra week of vacation because I was not getting a raise. To make a long story short, it did pass, but not without words being said.

I did most definitely earn my keep in that church and there were times when I had to put in a full week without a day off. I tried to take my days off, even when I had to re-arrange the taking of them and let them accumulate. It's nothing unusual for a pastor to put in sixty or more hours a week. Unless the pastor learns to "put on the breaks," the congregation will literally work him to death. Besides, most pastors are husbands and fathers who are expected by God to fulfill their biblical responsibilities to their families.

I remember one finance committee chairman, who had served in that position for several years, telling the committee that he hoped that sometime in the future the church could give me a raise. It had never given me one in the years that I had been there and it could have done so that very year. What really got away with me that cut me to the bone is what he said afterwards. He made the comment, "if he had received no raise in that length of time, then he would be looking for another job." Only God knows what he meant by what he said, but I know how it sounded and it hurt me deeply. I'm going to assume that it was an honest slip of the tongue and that he meant no harm, but it was a thoughtless remark none the less.

Another church that I served owed a building debt when I arrived on the scene. I was told flat out that the building debt had to be paid first and then the pastor if funds were available. It was

in that very church, I made a discovery for which I wasn't looking. With the passing of time, the treasurer decided that she wanted to give up her job. I felt that it was best to have the books audited in order for the new treasurer to have a clean slate with which to start. An outside accountant was hired to do the audit. It seems like he is the one who made the suggestion that the entire set of books, including the building fund, be audited. We had two treasurers, a general treasurer, and another one for the building fund.

To my surprise, one day I received a call from the accountant who told me that he needed to meet with me and the deacons. An appointment was made at which time he informed us what a terrible mess he found in the books. Furthermore, he informed us that we had money that was not being reported to the church. To make a long story short and without going into all the detail, we paid the building debt off and the woman who was treasurer of this fund is the one that started a lynch mob to get rid of me (see the chapter on The Firing of a Pastor).

There was one church that paid me the best of any that I pastored and didn't seem to begrudge it. These people had the attitude that if they made good salaries, then they wanted their pastor to make one also. I didn't accept the call to this church for the money, because the truth of the matter is that I didn't want to go when I first met with the committee. After the Lord gave me His peace, I answered in the affirmative. I appreciate the manner in which this church took care of our financial needs. Neither did they begrudge giving me time off. This was the most generous church that I pastored when it came to matters of compensation and vacation. It was during this time when my mother who lived in another city was so very sick. They were more than gracious in telling me to go and take care of her and not worry about anything on the church field. This church had its down side, but the financial care of the pastor was a plus for them.

The expectations from a congregation are very great of most pastors. When people give you a call on the phone or demand your attention in other ways, they never stop to think that they're not the only ones doing the same of the pastor. For instance, if a parishioner keeps the pastor tied up on the phone for an hour, it's

very possible that another one or two callers will try to do the same thing the same day. Therefore, due to the lack of consideration of these types of demands, the pastor must learn how to control the telephone. For a long time, we always answered our home phone when it rang, but because of all the demanding calls and unreal expectations, we had to learn how to let the answering machine take over in order to screen the necessary calls from the unnecessary ones.

So many folk in the church expect the pastor to jump like a puppet on a string whenever he is contacted. People will call for all kinds of reasons. The danger of this is when people cry, “wolf” all the time, you don’t know when to believe the wolf is at the door. Church people just don’t stop to think about all the high expectations in wanting a pastor to be all things to all people. They never stop to consider how much time it takes to do all the visitation that is expected (including funeral home visitation for members as well as their relatives), preparing and preaching funerals, prepare (quality) sermons (up to three per week), make hospital rounds, be present (at all hours) to have prayer before surgeries, tend to the nursing home patients, keep up with the shut-ins, and on and on we could go. With aging members in most congregations, these demands can be overwhelming even in a small church.

What are deacons for anyway? Good question! In the average Baptist church, deacons don’t know how to do their job. They are supposed to be servants who help the pastor. So much of what is expected of the pastor is actually the deacon’s job. But, try and convince a Baptist church of that! I never pastored a church where the deacons as a whole had a biblical concept of their God-given role. That’s not to say that I didn’t have the privilege of serving with some wonderful men who loved the Lord, but the greatest majority never could grasp the biblical concept of being a New Testament deacon. I tried to teach from God’s Word what deacon’s were to do, but breaking through old traditions is a hard thing. It’s best to learn something right to begin with so that you don’t have to unlearn error and re-program the understanding.

God doesn’t call pastors to change spiritual diapers or stick spiritual pacifiers in the mouths of whining people. He’s not to

be a spiritual fireman running around putting out fires in the congregation started by troublemakers. Unfortunately, I'm afraid that is what many pastors end up doing. It becomes a waste of energy and consumes so much unnecessary time.

Sometimes, it seems like pastors go unappreciated by their congregations. I'm not saying that pastors are to be placed on a pedestal. GOD FORBID! We're nothing more than lowly servants of the KING OF KINGS! What I'm saying is that God's work can become very discouraging and it helps to know that your "labour of love" (Heb. 6:10) is not in vain. A salary increase is just one way that a congregation can show appreciation.

There are various other ways that a church can express love for their pastor. They can daily pray for him and support his ministry by faithful attendance in the preaching services. After spending hours of study in sermon preparation, a preacher doesn't like preaching to empty pews. Most of the time, the church gave me a gift of some type at Christmas. Sometimes it was monetary and sometimes it wasn't. Almost every Christmas, there were individuals in the congregation that would remember me and my family with gifts. We accepted them as tokens of their love for us. These folk will never know how much that meant and what an encouragement it was.

There were times when a church would have me, and sometimes my family, stand at the front of the auditorium at the close of a service and take up an offering for us. We would stand at the front as the congregation would come by and shake our hands. As they went by, they would place whatever they so desired in the offering plate. Usually, this was at Christmas or some other special occasion. It was greatly appreciated, but I must admit, it was also humiliating. It made you feel like a panhandler on the street begging. Our children remember it to this day. It made an "impression" on them! The people meant well, but they just didn't think it through as to the best way to give such a gift. It could have been given through the budget and from the church checking account. Or else, the money could have been collected from individuals and then presented to the pastor. Some people have chosen to give a gift enclosed in a card. Upon my retirement from the pastorate, the church that I served at the

time did it very appropriately. The gift was extremely gracious and we were most appreciative.

I can only remember twice that a church held an official pastor appreciation day for me. One church did it on Sunday and gave me a special offering with a luncheon afterwards. The other church had a cookout. But, get this! They told me that they were going to cook fish for my pastor appreciation. Everyone knew I wasn't crazy about boney fish, so they were going to cook me a piece of chicken (for which I was grateful). Actually, I was no more than an excuse for them to have a church fish fry. There was one other church that mentioned pastor appreciation one Sunday at the close of the service. It was announced that it was pastor appreciation day and that I was appreciated. The benediction was pronounced and we were dismissed. I'm grateful that it was at least acknowledged.

Everywhere we lived, God always sent individuals to help us and meet our various needs. When we needed our car repaired, God sent a church member to do the labor without charge. When there was no income, God laid it upon hearts to help us financially without me ever asking. When I needed assistance with my computer, God always provided someone to donate their valuable time and services on my behalf. I'm so very grateful to God's loving people who gave unto the Lord and supplied income for my family. I had the privilege of living and raising my family off of the tithes and offerings from obedient believers who were cheerful givers (II Cor. 9:7). Even now, in retirement, I'm reminded each month of God's provision as I draw my small, but greatly appreciated, annuity from GuideStone of the SBC.

One of the greatest ways that a church can show appreciation for their pastor is to demonstrate their love in both word and deed. I'll never forget a time when things were very difficult in this particular church. At the close of the service, as I was greeting people upon their departure, I remember Brother Paul taking me by the hand and looking straight into my eyes. With a face that spelled sincerity and with a voice that expressed his depth of emotion, he said to me, "Preacher, I love you." He'll never know what they meant to me.

I served in another church that frequently told me, by various members, that they loved me. There was this short elderly widow in particular that would pull on my arm so that I would bend down. Then, she would give me a peck on the cheek and tell me that she “loved me.” Miss Faye loved people and people loved her. She loved her pastor. This lady was poor, in so far as earthly goods were concerned, but she was rich when it came to friends. Let this be a reminder that there is more than one way to count riches.

This can also be said of pastors. Most of us will never be wealthy with the riches of this world, but the man of God serves the Lord, not to lay up “treasures upon earth” but “treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19-20). It helps for a congregation to show appreciation, but regardless of whether it is expressed or not, the pastor serves his Lord because of the call of God upon his life. The pastor’s goal is to someday hear the Lord say to him, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21).

As I close this chapter, my advice to all reading this book, especially pastors, is to stay out of debt. Indebtedness is enslavement. Remember Proverbs 22:7, “The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.” Regardless of how much or how little your salary, stay out of debt! I realize there may be a “few” exceptions to this, such as the buying of a house, but do as the old saying, “don’t bite off more than you can chew.” I personally stayed out of debt, except for a house, and never left a church that I pastored in debt.

If you can make a car payment, then you can save your money until you have enough to pay cash for the car. You can do this, even while making a small salary if you learn to budget. That which makes the difference is called, discipline. It’s a poor testimony when a church or a Christian cannot properly manage its money and has the bill collectors knocking at your door. If you can’t manage your money, then how can you manage anything else in your life? Always obey God in the giving of your tithes and offerings and honor Him in every aspect of your finances. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth ... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:19-21).

Chapter 25

Moving Experiences

We've moved more times than I would like to imagine. The very thought of moving does something to me that I cannot describe. It's never been easy, but the older we grow in age, the harder it is both mentally and physically. In fact, moving is one of life's greatest traumas. As of the writing of this book, we have moved a total of 16 times (meaning that we've lived in 16 different houses, including 8 different parsonages) within a period of thirty-four years. Two of those moves were made while I was pastor of the same church. At the time I became the pastor, the church didn't have a parsonage, so they rented us a house until they purchased one, meaning that we moved twice within five months.

When our oldest son was only four years old, he knew so much about moving that he even played like he was moving. I built a little "club house" for the children in the backyard. One day, Ann looked out the window and saw him loading up his little red wagon with all kinds of play furniture and play pots and pans from the club house. He would move in and out of the little structure. He even loaded our little Boston Terrier dog, "Spanky," onto the wagon and included him in his moving. Poor little fellow, at the age of only four, he was well acquainted with moving.

Moving is stressful, anyway you cut it. There are all sorts of things that have to be overcome in a move. I remember one time when we moved into a two-story house. Our bedroom suit has long post over six feet tall on all four corners attached to the headboard and footboard. The post would not clear the stairs and I had to do what I had to do and then put it back together once we got it upstairs. When it came time to move out of that house, we had built a porch over the front steps, and we maneuvered those post out the window to keep from doing any further damage to the post.

Almost every pastor knows about U-hauls. Some of our moves were done by U-haul in order to save money. We always

did the packing of household goods. On several occasions, the church that called me to the new field of service willingly offered for me to select a moving company of my choice. We had various experiences with those movers, some good and some not so good.

The worse movers that we encountered, were a bunch of losers. We were moving less than thirty miles of where we lived. They were late showing up and took forever to load the truck. I had already emptied the out buildings and had everything of that sort outside waiting to be placed on the truck. All of a sudden, the driver refused to load anything else. We had a few words, but he refused to load the rest of our goods and insisted that he had to come back and make another load. All he wanted to do was rack up another bill. He closed the truck door and took off. It was dark when they finished unloading the truck and I told him to forget going back. We paid him with the check that the church had given me. Julie and I immediately went to rent a U-haul and made our way back to where we had lived, hoping that everything would still be there in the yard. Fortunately, the Lord was looking out for us. We loaded up the rest of our belongings and made our way to the new residence. What an experience!

There were other times, when we had some excellent movers. I came across this company when I moved my mother from her home into an assisted living facility. Later, I had to use them again, when she required a move from her hometown to where I was pastoring at the time. When I received a pastoral call back to the town where I grew up, this meant that it required a move for my mother as well as us. I used the same moving company for my mother one month and then for us the next month. I had to get my mother moved from a nursing facility into an assisted living quarters so that she could be settled prior to our move. If you will count the number of times that I used these same movers, you will discover that I used them a total of four times and it was over a period of two years. Three of those times were for my mother, but the fact remains that we got to be friends with these movers. In so much so that when they moved us the last time, they told my wife that they were “going to miss us.”

One of the biggest regrets of my life is moving my family so much. If I had it to do over, there is one side of me that says I would not have moved like I did. But, then there is another side of me that says when I moved; I was trying to do what I felt God wanted me to do at the time. I kept thinking that when I changed churches that things would get better, but all churches are basically the same. Some just have more saved people than others, but they're all mostly alike.

If I had never made the moves that I've made, and gone to the places that I've gone, and met the people that I've met, then I wouldn't know what I know today. There is no way that one could convince me that church life for a pastor is what it is, unless I'd experienced it like I have. The best part of making all our moves is meeting some wonderful people and making new friends. We treasure our Christian brothers and sisters and appreciate their friendship more than they will ever know.

One of the ways that we tried to compensate the moving of our children from school to school was to home school. Whenever home schooling was made legal in the State of North Carolina back in the mid 1980's, we chose to home school. That is one decision that I've never regretted. Julie was in High School and wanted to take health occupations and for that reason we let her remain and graduate in the public school. We started home schooling Wilson in the second grade and Stuart in the seventh. Both boys graduated with a home school group and we're proud of the accomplishments of all three of our children.

I don't know what the future holds, but in so far as I'm concerned, I hope that we won't have to make any more earthly moves. We've told our children that the next move that we plan to make will either be to the Baptist Home or to the cemetery. Needless to say, I say that "tongue in check." Only God knows what the future holds for any of us and I've learned that whatever He wills is what I want. I trust that if it's His will that we'll not have to do any more packing. The smell of cardboard boxes and even the rearranging of furniture are enough to depress me.

Chapter 26

Eternal Praise

The Psalmist said, “Let everything that hath breath, praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord” (Psa. 150:6). There is no way that I can ever praise God sufficiently for His goodness and grace that He has showered down upon me through the years. I praise God for my salvation that Jesus purchased for me on the cross. I praise God for my family, my wife, and children. I praise God for my call to serve Him. I praise God for the churches that He allowed me to pastor. I praise God for each new day that He gives me. On and on I could go giving praise unto my God.

The doctrine of GRACE has always been my most favorite theme. God’s GRACE has saved me, God’s GRACE has sustained me, God’s GRACE has kept me, and God’s GRACE has and always will be “sufficient” (II Cor. 12:9). We named our Home School, Grace Christian Academy. The name of my present ministry is Covenant of Grace Ministries. Our radio ministry is called Covenant of Grace Radio. God’s GRACE has permitted me to serve my Lord of glory all these many years. Of all people, I am the most unfit and unworthy soul to ever do anything for God. It has been a privilege beyond measure to study, preach, and teach the Word of God.

If I had life to live over again, I would do many things differently because I’ve made many mistakes along the way. I would love to correct those wrongs, but that’s impossible. All I can do is learn from them and allow God to use them as stepping-stones in my spiritual maturity. However, there is one thing that I wouldn’t do over, even if I could. I’ve never regretted trying to follow God’s call to serve Him with my life. If I had a thousand lives to live, I’d want to live each one to the glory of God’s GRACE and to His eternal praise.

I’m sure that in the writing of this book, I’ve left out episodes, experiences, and thoughts that I will think of latter. But, even everything that Jesus did is not recorded in Holy Scripture (Jh. 21:25). Hopefully, this book will be read to the glory of God and the experiences recorded herein will be a

reminder, especially to men in ministry, that our God is faithful. Life is hard. Christian ministry is difficult. Dealing with people in the church gets sticky. Things are not perfect. We are living in a fallen world. But, “PRAISE GOD,” He is and always will be on His throne. To those whom He has called, He will be faithful! We must never forget as we battle this fight of faith, that the “battle is the Lord’s” (I Sam. 17:47).

To pastors and people in Christian ministry who are reading this book, I want you to know that regardless of how steep and rocky the road, God will see you through your times of distress. I’ve been there and sometimes I didn’t think that I would ever see light at the end of the tunnel. There were times when I had to look up to see bottom. I felt lower than a snake’s belly. God will do for you what He did for me. He will take you by the hand and walk with you through your valleys. He has been far better to me than what I deserve and He will be to you also. Don’t ever forget that “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (II Cor. 9:8).

From the very beginning of my ministry back in the latter part of the 1960’s, my desire was to have a radio ministry. Different people like different things and God calls each of us to minister in different ways. I always liked radio and my desire; if the Lord permitted was to have a radio ministry whenever the day came for me to retire from the pastorate. Several years prior to my pastoral retirement, I shared my “dream” with Rev. Gerald Primm, a dear pastor friend of mine who has now gone home to be with the Lord.

With his encouragement, Covenant of Grace Ministries was begun on June 30, 2006. It was two years prior to my retirement in hopes of being able to retire from the pastorate when I did on July 30, 2008. As a result, we became a non-profit organization, and started receiving charitable gifts to the ministry. Immediately, I began a quarterly publication that is now called “*The Traveling Pulpit*,” which is a condensed Bible Study along with a ministry update. Our mailing list consists of both e-mail and postal mail. One year after getting organized, our Internet ministry (www.covenantofgraceministries.com) was started and one

month after my retirement, our first Bible Study was broadcast over WTRU in the Triad of North Carolina.

In closing, I would like to express appreciation to all the many people who have loved and supported me down through the years. I will be eternally grateful for each and every person that held up my arms like “Aaron and Hur” did for Moses (Ex. 17:12). The good part of making so many moves was getting to meet and learning to love new brothers and sisters in Christ. I’ll always treasure your friendship.

Especially, I’m grateful for my wife who has stood by me through the thick and thin of Christian ministry. She has been my best friend and confidant. When she married me, she had no idea, as did I, what life in the ministry was like. We had both grown up in church, but only saw it from the side of the pew. I also deeply appreciate our children who endured the agony of moving so many times with so many different adjustments.

Everywhere God placed me in the pastorate; He put me there for a remnant. My ministry never did appeal to the majority, but to a remnant of believers. God has always had His remnant and He always will. What a humble privilege to be a part of God’s remnant. When that remnant is gathered on the other side, we’re going to have an eternal good time together at the feet of Jesus. To those who are numbered among God’s “elect,” I’ll be looking for you on the other side and we’ll all declare God’s praise eternally.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” (Ps. 23:1-6)

“Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.” (Ps. 146:1-2)