

The Guy in the Tie
XI My Last Hurrah and First "O Hear Ye"

I left for Waco in the summer of '72. I had a summer job at Ideal Aluminum as a sill cutter in a window factory, and I also took a three hour microbiology class at Baylor to get my grades back on track. I was preparing for my senior year, my final crack at football. A couple of significant things happened like brush strokes on my soul – a soul that God had begun to remake.

For one, I made a B in a class of Baylor nursing majors and med techs and found out that I was a heck of a lot more academic than I thought. When something interested me I could grasp to whatever I applied myself. I found that all knowledge began to arrange itself in light of the greater truth of Christ "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3). "Knowledge is easy to him who hath understanding" (Proverbs 14:6b).

I also found myself away from North Texas athletes and among a new bunch of friends with altogether different ambitions. A number of these Baptist students had deep devotion to Christ and were bold unashamed witnesses for Him. They also had disciplines of study, prayer and moral maxims. And many were talking of something about to happen in Dallas. A Christian response among collegians to the 60s – something called Explo '72. Tens of thousands gathering in Dallas at the Cotton Bowl as a Christian answer to Woodstock. Not the Jesus People or Jesus Freaks but college Christians who had another path in life. Not drugs or sex or rebellion or heavy metal but the Lord Jesus Christ. One Way. There was a buzz. Something was in the air. I was part of a tidal wave among my generation.

And something else happened that was one of the most crucial events of my entire Christian future. My job as a window sill cutter earned a buck sixty-five – about 60 dollars a week doing a mind numbing repetitive task of cutting and pressing aluminum into window sills of all sizes. But I knew that I was to represent Christ in all I did so I did my work to His glory. I worked fast, getting so far ahead of the assembly line that I would at times have to shut down so they could catch up. I arranged my carts and the sills on them in perfect symmetry and alignment. At the end of a day I power-sprayed my area and kept it immaculate. It so inspired the fellow who cut the window's heads that he got caught up in the same excellence. I found that there was no area of life that Christ was not Head over.

I also ran into Mrs. Pawnee Martin, my junior high Sunday school teacher. I told her of what had happened in my life, and she asked if I would speak to her class. So there in the summer of 1972 to about twenty 14 year olds I talked for the first time about Christ from a lectern. I spoke about – and I remember today – our search for axiomatic ideas but finding no means by which we could know for sure. (Remember, this was in the wake of the 60s.) I said to those students – "I've found the truth." That same warm, invigorating, clarity of thought – and a strange boldness bordering on indignation and rage – again coursed its way through my veins and gizzard. A sensation that I would learn to recognize and expect for the next half century – without fail.

Some nights I would lay awake and preach to myself and think “Hmmm.” I returned for two-a-day workouts for my senior year a different young man than ever before. And when I walked in the athletic dorm I was greeted in the first ten seconds with a new purpose in life. John Bowles, the big, nasty offensive lineman who had asked me about my faith, came walking up to me with a big smile. I took one look at him and knew what had happened. He said “I did it.” It was the first time that I would hear the blessed words of someone who said he had become a Christian from my sowing the word. We clasped hands, the hands of brothers. He said he had taken out a Christian girl who shared with him the same testimony as I did. Two witnesses confirmed the message, and he believed. Following close behind him was my center on the offensive line named Clark Lawrence, a backslidden Baptist from Abilene that John had shared with over the summer and who had begun to recommit a wandering life. He would become my spiritual grandson. My second son is John Clark Nelson from these two men. Slowly and surely football ceased to dominate my thoughts and ambitions to be replaced by the cause of Christ. I was discovering the meaning in life that I was desperate for.

I was playing well that summer and then one day Coach Rod Rust called me to his office. I was being moved from quarterback to safety. Here was the first major test of my Christian life. Could I trust God with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding? I have always believed that God made me for Himself and equipped me for His purpose, and that He could guide me into it by His own providence. I have never doubted this even in the hardest of circumstances and God’s sovereignty has been proved o’er and o’er. It began on that day in Coach Rust’s office.

Actually I did really well at safety. I had a QB’s sense of anticipating the play and I was physical enough. But I *wasn’t* fast, and I *would have* gotten burned a hundred times. But I never found out, because that week we had a scrimmage. You never forget turning points in your life and this was one. Wayne Watts of Dallas Sunset rolled to his left. Sammy Swierc of Pittsburg, Texas, ran a seam route trying to split the secondary. I laid back (cagey as a jungle cat) knowing Wayne wanted all of it. When he threw, David Deaton, middle linebacker from Boyd, just tipped the ball that fluttered over the receiver. I played him perfect and picked him off. I immediately broke left against the flow and busted loose. I could see the end zone flag 50 yards away and hooked ’em, running free. Out of the corner of my vision I could see wide receiver Tom Dignan of Richardson High angling back to cut me. He went for my legs and I put on the brakes and went around him, but all I heard was my right knee . . . “POW.” My anterior cruciate blew and I went down like I’d been shot. The pain was white-hot and I knew without anyone telling me that I had lost my senior year just like I did my sophomore year. I pulled up the grass in pain as I lay face down and yet I recall vividly the sense of providence. I actually thanked God in faith as I lay there. God simply gave me an assurance that all would be well. When we went to play our first game with Long Beach State, I was in the hospital recovering from season ending knee surgery. I remember when Dr. Charles MacAdams diagnosed my torn ligament and said it would require surgery. There for the first and only time I just broke down and cried in my car outside his office because I knew that the part of my life as an athlete was over. It was like an old friend had died. God would have to make me somebody new.

The surgery having been done, I began to rehab. I would go to the clinic then come back to my room and roommate John Bowles. Johnny was my “brother born for the day of adversity.” Still today we are there for each other, thick and thin. John, Clark Lawrence and I were, as we understood, the lone Christians on our team.

But one day I came back to our room – 412B Kerr Hall – and John was pumped up. He told me a guy had come and talked to the whole football team about Jesus! I sat astounded. God’s name was spoken often on our team but never in adoration, if you get my drift. He said a fellow from Campus Crusade whose name was John Flack presented boldly, clearly and to a dead silent team the gospel of Christ and even gave an invitation to receive Christ. John Bowles was beside himself that the whole team heard of “Peace, Pardon, Power, and Purpose” and all from Christ.

A few days later a staff man from Campus Crusade came by named John McKean – the staff director – to follow up on this Bowles guy who wrote down on his card that he was a Christian. John McKean and John Bowles were talking and I walked in with my cast on my right leg having just finished rehab. John McKean realized in a few moments that he had hit the parachurch ministry jackpot – two varsity players, fresh converted, blank slates, reading their Bibles on their own, desperate for truth.

John McKean began meeting with us. He took us to a Campus Crusade meeting – myself, John, Clark, and our girlfriends. He introduced us to John Flack, the 40 year old Dallas Seminary Graduate who was one of the first Campus Crusade college evangelists who majored in evangelism to fraternities and sororities. I and my two pals had met a couple of bona fide Christian warriors living completely for the Great Commission. We did not have the opportunity to be among weak, compromising, apologetic Christianity but among Crusaders. I will always be in their debt. John McKean introduced me to one of his staff from Fredericksburg – Jim Kothman, the man who asked me the question, “And what is a Christian?” I thanked him long and vociferously.

John McKean disciplined John Bowles and myself that fall even though we did not know what discipleship was. That Christmas season he came to our room and played a tape by a fellow named Howard Hendricks and another named Josh McDowell and asked if we’d like to go to a “Christmas Conference.” John Bowles went home to Virginia, but I was able to take about five days to go to “Solution Bowl”. It was a conference on Lemmon Avenue in Dallas. There must have been 1500 students there. I stayed with some guys from LSU and got totally exposed to a Christianity I did not know existed. My life was pretty well limited to athletes and coaches but here were people alien to, unaware of, and frankly uncaring about all that had made me . . . well, me. I realized at that conference that I was part of an enormous family. These were truly brothers and sisters in Christ –many with ambitions toward spiritual things that I did not know existed: ministry, missions, discipleship, educational goals, seminary, Christ-centered marriages and dating, political ambitions, ambitions in music, Crusade staff, professorships, church planting. My head was spinning. I watched 1500 students sing. I had seen Woodstock and student drug culture and Manson and the Chicago Democratic National Convention, but here I saw the total contrast.

I also heard men handle the word of God in an expositional exegetical way. They rightly divided it. They let the Bible speak for itself. I listened to them speak with a zeal and a passion and a hope which I had only heard in radicals and commies. I heard a thing called “apologetics” that fascinated me. I heard of a place not too far from Lemmon Avenue that some guys had visited – Dallas Theological Seminary – said to be “the best”.

And I also heard a dapper, bald-headed, short fellow named Dr. Howard Hendricks. A man who could’ve been the father to all of us – a professor of Christian Education at Dallas Seminary. I would arrive at 6 o’clock for the 7 o’clock meeting so I could sit on the front row right beside the lectern. I had had professors and coaches and pastors but never had I been exposed to anyone like this. He dressed sharp. He walked deliberately. He spoke with clarity and unapologetic boldness. He spoke with fire and challenge. He was relevant and practical. And he was a workman of the word, a skilled story teller. He was fundamental and I didn’t even know what that meant! *And* he was funny. He told no jokes (the lowest form of humor). He had comic genius. I sat close and watched him night after night. A new light of direction had appeared to me, a new craft, a new dream.

But as I rehabbed my knee, I began to feel the old competitive fires burn. Should I go ahead and graduate on time in ’73 or should I play a 5th year or “redshirt” year? In college athletics you have four years of eligibility within five years. One year can be lost and regained if injured or if a player sits out a year just to mature. I had a redshirt year if I wanted it. I would never have considered it if there had not been a major shakeup at North Texas. Rod Rust and all but one staff had been fired, and Hayden Fry, the former coach at SMU, was hired. Hayden had won a SWC championship in ’66 and everyone was amazed that we got him. He wanted to make NTSU the Notre Dame, the Penn State of the South. I can’t say that I really prayed about it, but when the drums of fall began to play I could not resist. I just wanted to play one time for a staff like Hayden Fry was assembling. Hayden went on to Hall of Fame greatness at Iowa where he took them to the Rose Bowl. You could smell “winner” on him when he walked in.

I was doing the final stage of my Phys. Ed. curriculum as a student teacher at Lewisville High School, but I committed to the off season workouts and threw my hat in with the new regime for ’73 - ’74. I really felt coached and coached well. Mike Crocker had coached Tommy Kramer of Minnesota Viking fame at San Antonio Lee, the State Champs, and he was breaking into the college ranks as Hayden’s QB coach. He was young and talented. I never played better, even with a rebuilt knee.

One day there was a note on my desk to go by and see Coach Crocker . . . My heart leaped and I raced over. Coach Crocker said, “Tommy, I see you’re a 5th year senior.” I said “Yes sir.” He said, “What made you want to play a 5th year?” I said, “Well coach, I just wanted one shot to play for some people like you.” “Tommy,” he said, “we’re honored but the fact is we’re probably going to lose some and we’ve got to do so with a mind to rebuild. We can’t rebuild with a 5th year senior. We’re going to let you go.”

I’d gotten cut. I had never been cut from anything.

So far in my Christian life I had been moved to the secondary, tore up my knee, and gotten cut. I reviewed the first of those four spiritual laws – “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” Maybe the most fundamental mindset of the Christian life is to be able to walk by faith in the providence of God when reason has no answers. To, like Abraham, go out not knowing where you are going. God was schooling me. I was learning how to trust Him.

I stood outside the coach’s office and looked into the sky. I remember it clearly. I said “My life is Yours. You’re in control and I’m going to trust you.”

I was officially a has-been at 22. What to do? My path was that of a coach and Phys. Ed./Biology teacher. I was student teaching at Lewisville. I was meeting with Campus Crusade. I was disciplined in the basics. I had a girl that I would – I thought – soon marry. I took a part-time job at Keno’s Convenience Store to make a little money. My time was free for the first time in my life. I would now do the most difficult of Christian disciplines – I would wait on God.

I would not have to wait long. I had no idea what lay in store. It would be the ride of a lifetime.

The Guy in the Tie
XII “Come Out to a Land You Know Not”

For all of my conscious life I had had one focus – football. At 22 it was over. I left for Lewisville the next morning for another day of student teaching. One of their coaches, the QB coach, was named Don Harvey and being myself a quarterback, he and I became good friends. I knew he was in charge of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes so I gave him some Athletes In Action magazines.

A few weeks later Coach Harvey came to me one morning in the teachers’ lounge and asked me if I could come speak to his FCA – about 20 boys. I had given my testimony at a Campus Crusade outreach but that was the extent of my speaking. Of course now I had nothing but time because football was behind me. I said yes. Then I went to John McKean, my Crusade director and said “What do I do?” He said “Here, memorize this” and handed me four sheets of typed paper that read “God’s Plan” – a pre-written message for evangelistic events that all Crusade staff could learn and give. It spoke of the Pardon, Peace, Purpose and Power that God offered men through the gospel. I memorized it cold . . . put in some of my own testimony and ideas and practiced it 10,000 times. Most of my practicing coming from standing in the refrigerator at Kenos convenience store in between customers. (Told you I memorized it cold.)

The night came. My buddy John Bowles came over to Lewisville after spring practice. John would start that next year for Hayden Fry and have his best year as NT would tie for the Missouri Valley Conference championship. The guy who introduced me to the 16 athletes present was the Lewisville trainer, Mark Wilson who had been my trainer at NT for all four years. Mark and I were close and through my witness he had become a Christian. I was later his best man and he was one of my groomsmen. When he introduced me he said, “Tommy introduced me to the Great Physician and I took care of his injuries.” They applauded.

I stood and began. A watershed arose in my life from that moment on.

It’s hard to explain the grace of communicating God’s Word. To explain “ye shall receive power . . .” (Acts 1:8). It’s almost as if you are standing outside yourself, watching. Where you might normally be nervous, you are calm because you are simply reporting truthfully the claims and actions of another. Thoughts come in clear sequence and most of all there are the affections of the believer – compassion, love, anger, courage – that surface in the soul. Time races by. It’s like being carried in the wind.

I finished and said, “Anyone want to become a Christian?” Of the sixteen, eight of them raised their hands. We circled up and prayed the sinner’s prayer. When I left I was walking on air. John Bowles said to me emphatically, “You’re going to be an evangelist.”

I wasn’t sure what to do. So I continued on, day by day trusting what I was now discovering, the never-failing purpose of God. He had a plan. My life was the ship. Life was the sea. Faith was the sail. God was the wind that carried me. I’ve never changed that

perspective. I went back to reading, praying, witnessing, student teaching, class, and Kenos convenience where I was quickly becoming a sensation in retail. None could front out shelves, dust merchandise, mop, and move candy, bread, and Dr. Pepper like yours truly. Mr. Keno (Bill Kenas) asked me to stay. Who could blame him? Talent like mine comes along once in a lifetime. I said “No thank you” but Bill and his wife became life-long friends.

But soon one of those sixteen FCAers came to me and asked if I would consider speaking to the **entire** Lewisville High School on behalf of FCA. The athlete who came to me was named Randy Mays, the team leader and later on an athletic director. We were talking now, not about sixteen guys in a locker room, but an entire high school in a gymnasium. Randy brought a legendary Lewisville alum named Joe Bishop to meet with the principal and plead for an assembly. I was in agreement with them on the outside but on the inside was saying, “Oh God, please no!” The possibility of being laughed at publically by a roomful of high school kids was more than my still ample ego could bear. At 22 there were only four to five years between me and these teens. God and I had our first serious collision of wills. But I realized that to give my life and purpose wholly to Christ was to give Him my reputation; also, to bear His reproach. I said, “I’ll do it God. You’ll be sorry. But I’ll do it.”

I practiced “God’s Plan” endlessly. It was my baptism by fire and to this day has been the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do as far as ministerial faithfulness.

The assembly was at 10 A.M. I taught tennis to the two morning classes then slipped into my 1972 seventies wardrobe – double knits, polyester shirt, two-toned brown shoes. Sweet! My Crusade director and his staff were there. My boy, John Bowles, was there. My girlfriend and her mother were there. John Flack, the Crusade evangelist, who spoke to our team, was there. Tom Hess, our three-miler came up to me to pray for me. He put his hand on me and prayed. He was shaking – exceedingly. I thought “Good night, Tom! *You’re* not doing the speaking!”

The kids seemed to know that something was up. An assembly was called for what no one knew. There was a buzz. Coach Harvey introduced me. He and I sat together on the bottom row of risers. He rose to walk to the microphone waiting on the free throw line . . . lonely, stark, bare. I made a mental note that a microphone waiting by itself looks just like the gallows.

Coach Harvey said the FCA was bringing a speaker because, “You need to hear what he has to say.” The rest was a blur until he said “So help me welcome Tommy Nelson.” A healthy applause came, probably from my six Phys. Ed. classes.

John Flack, the Crusader speaker who would mentor me over the coming year, had told me to “tell a joke and run to the cross.” My joke is funny still today! Then I said that I had nothing to say to them about religion but I wanted to talk about a relationship to the only truly unique person that has ever lived – the Lord Jesus Christ. And then I immediately said, “He was born in an obscure village, the child of peasants . . .” And I began “One Solitary Life.” It went dead silent. I stretched out the sufferings and the cross. Then what he had done in my life. It grew more silent. I did not know enough to be smooth and

professional. It was almost as if the walls of the building and the echoes had never heard such simple but profound ideas as those of the Bible. The silence grew deafening. As was my faith so was it done to me. God showed up and put forth His hand.

I didn't know any better than to pass out 3 x 5 cards and have them pray to receive Christ and check on their cards. I was innocently, unknowingly, unapologetically bold. Today the ACLU would have had me shot on sight along with the principal, Coach Harvey, and Jesus. But 150 kids said they prayed to receive Christ. It was brazen. I finished to a standing ovation. I trembled with joy for I'll bet three days.

Someone gave me an article about some athletes in England in the 1800s called The Cambridge Seven who all forsook noble possibilities and expectations and went into foreign missions – one being the famous C. T. Studd. So I, John Bowles, Clark Lawrence our center, and Tom Hess the three-miler went to Aubrey High School and gave our testimonies to the high school and then started an athletes Bible study in the TV room on the 4th floor of Kerr Hall that soon had 50 athletes. We didn't know enough to teach it ourselves but we brought in our Crusade director to teach. We opened it up for discussion and had some lively times into the night. We began to attract a growing "Jesus People" counter-culture crowd – or as John Bowles called them, "Lizards", and we soon filled the room. Churches around Denton began asking us to come and we went on the road. We had a 60s, Woodstock-ish, revolutionary spirit that was contagious. Campus Crusade put out a special letter on us to all their national college staff about the "North Texas Revival." No matter whether you went to the dining room, locker room, any room, you heard conversation about "Jesus." "What is this 'born again' stuff?" Ironically it was at this same time that Watergate began to break and Chuck Colson's "Born Again" book and message crested a wave of evangelicalism that rose through the 70s.

Before I finished my student teaching the Lewisville AD named Max Goldsmith stopped me in the hall and offered me a job in the Lewisville school system as a coach. I turned him down right there in the hall and said simply, "Max, God has something else I'm supposed to do. Something I never planned on. I'm just not sure what it is." And I didn't.

Was it staff with Campus Crusade? The Fellowship of Christian Athletes in Dallas approached me about a new position they had created called Field Staff that worked with high schools and colleges. Were these the answers? I did not know. All I knew is that I was possessed with an obsession for the preaching of the gospel. Again I would simply walk by faith knowing that "the secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him" (Ps. 25:14).

"He leadeth me O blessed thought"

As always it wasn't long before God . . . as usual . . .
shone His light on my path.

The life I knew was gone.

The Guy in the Tie
Part XIII "Christ To The World"

There were certain men who came into my life at crucial times. John Flack was one of the most interesting and the most controversial, and ultimately most tragic, but God used him greatly to shape certain things in me.

John was 40 when I was 23. He attended Princeton and then Dallas Seminary. He joined a fledgling organization named Campus Crusade, personally recruited by Bill Bright for the purpose of campus evangelism and conference speaking. Campus Crusade, for better or for worse, created its superstars, just like Hollywood. Many of them suffered spontaneous combustion. John Flack was one. He was a tragic Samson-like figure who was a master communicator, a one-time success motivation speaker, a passionate skilled evangelist who could captivate a crowd in seconds. He was 6 foot 2, around 260, handsome, with a basso profundo operatic voice. He had no indoor voice. Whenever I would say to Dallas Seminary professors that I had been mentored by John Flack, they all would roll their eyes, throw up their hands and then say the same two things – always. "He was one of the greatest natural talents we ever had here." And then, "the most undisciplined student we ever had." John had a handful of messages that he would give and a standard fraternity or sorority message where he would give the gospel. He was Josh McDowell before there was a Josh McDowell.

John was the Crusade superstar who married the top Crusade staff girl from the University of Arizona. Their marriage quickly cratered. John became bitter, quit the ministry and moved to Chicago to try to make a million dollars in business. In 1972 he moved back to Dallas and "re-upped" and began speaking again for Crusade on small group setups. All this brought him to North Texas and our football team in 1972. He had also begun his own para-church organization call "Christ To The World." He wanted to train young men to "think on their feet" and be able to share the gospel in evangelistic settings. I had never been around anyone like him. He had fervency, boldness, zeal and passion. He was a Dallas Seminary grad and was familiar with a scholastic dimension of the faith of which I was unaware. He also was a professional communicator and was one of the best in the craft of evangelistic presentation. John Flack asked me to be a part of his organization. A two-man organization. Me and Flack. I guessed I would be the eastern hemisphere.

How did I know I would be half of a world evangelistic organization? I went with John to raise support from a Dallas realtor named James Hetherington. My job was to beat John's drum as to how God had used him on the NT campus. I had never heard of "support", much less how or why one raised it. The ministerial culture was beyond me. But I told James all that had happened on the campus and all that John Flack wanted to accomplish and the next thing I knew James Hetherington turned in his chair and said to me, "Tommy what are you going to do?" I said, "Well I'm not real sure. Maybe I'll go with John and just let God take care of my needs." James said, "Tommy, I wanna give **you** three hundred dollars!" I had never seen three hundred dollars. I thought he had given me ten thousand. That was my decision to become half of the new worldwide parachurch gen-u-ine missionary organization "Christ To The World." A washed out Campus Crusader trying to make a

comeback who was “persona non grata” at the world’s best seminary and an eighteen month old Christian with less than five messages under his belt.

Once again God had guided me.

Three hundred dollars bought me a blue suit with a plaid vest and matching plaid pants and a pink shirt with blue and cream patent leather raised heels – sweet! And I still had two hundred bucks left!

I graduated in August with a Phys Ed degree. I moved into an upstairs garage-like “apartment” (loose term) for 75 bucks a month – my share of the hundred and fifty rent I shared with the Lewisville trainer Mark Wilson. We lived on a gravel road behind the campus, across from a fire station, fifty feet off the road. We had no TV, no radio, just a record player. I proved to be a disaster in fund raising. Only the father of a childhood friend who ran the window plant where I worked and was in the John Birch Society supported me because I also was opposed to Communism. I said, “God I’ll speak for you. You care for me.” He did.

I began to meet with John Flack where he lived in Dallas. I began to accompany him when he would speak on campuses. I went with him to Kansas University and we spoke to all the athletic teams, sororities and fraternities. We saw a hundred students profess to receive Christ. John threw me into the middle of a fraternity meeting. He said “Tomorrow you’re on at the Theta Chis.” Such was my baptism.

I learned something quickly. In the Christian world the word travels like a prairie fire whenever anyone handles the scripture clearly and unapologetically. This is what I did. I was saved by the clear presentation of the truth. I was in darkness because of its being obscured and being silent. From my conversion onward I instinctively loved the clarity of the Bible and deeply resented whatever hid its truth. I presented it in the innocent boldness of a young convert to grace!

And I found out something else. The above people were few and far between. A proclaimer of the truth was a sought after commodity. Once I began speaking to FCAs and football teams and youth groups and Sunday School classes and midweek youth Bible studies and Methodist men’s pancake breakfasts, the word went out that a former quarterback at North Texas (always a sensation even if a bad quarterback) was talking of Christ. I never asked for money. To this day I have never once asked for money or demanded a fee. I simply let God provide and He has never failed to do so. I learned that early on. Long story made short, I was now a gen-u-ine bonafide evangelist for a worldwide missionary organization (of two people) who could be given tax free love offerings. God had maneuvered me into a perfect scenario. Periodically I would meet with John Flack and we would raise support (for him) or just eat together and talk about ministry of which he had loads of live combat experience on women and marriage of which he had been a disaster. I was learning. We spoke to the NT football team in the fall of ’73. He spoke and I gave my testimony. I gave my testimony to the men who knew me best and who listened closer than any group I had ever spoken to because they literally had seen me before and after and I had their respect

as a leader. They literally stared at me as I shared my struggle and crisis in coming to faith. I was living proof.

When I wasn't meeting with or traveling with John, I was speaking here and there living off of God's provision. But most of all I was alone off the main roads, 50 feet off the gravel road, upstairs in a monastic like setting in total silence. My roommate left at 6:00 am and came home at 7:00 pm. I had solitude. I went through withdrawals, the withdrawals from 20th century meaningless amusements. I learned to love the quiet of study, prayer, quality reading, contemplation, and delighting myself in the Bible. August of '73 until August of '74 was the most significant year of my life. Just me and God. Hours and hours each day. My eyes fell for the first time on most of my Bible.

God brought some interesting people into my life at this time. A particular real estate man named Jim Attaya heard me share my testimony and asked me to share a devotional at the Wilson Real Estate Company in Sanger, Texas. About five men and a sweet secretary named Barbara McClary had me come every Tuesday morning. They knew I was hand to mouth. So every couple of months they would all chip in and keep me going. One fellow would sell his silvery stock. Another would pull a couple of hundreds off his roll. One fellow would give me 10% of his poker winnings. Barbara would give me ten dollars a month the whole year. I was responsible for half of the world. One time, Big John Wilson said, "Paul . . . (their nickname for me – "Apostle Paul") . . . yore chariot . . . (my '66 Fairlane) needs to be reshod." (i.e. "you need a new car") They went and got me a loan and a '69 Chevy Impala for 75 bucks a month. God took care of me through my own band of real estate salesmen for that whole year. I never missed a meal or a payment.

And it was at this time that something else occurred – Systematic Theology. John told me to pick up 52 Major Bible Themes, a shortened systematic theology of Lewis Chafer edited by John Walvoord. It brought each area of theology into accord with all other areas. It was like steroids to my soul. I literally read the book until it fell apart in my hands. It enabled me to see the big picture of God's purpose and activity.

I also began a love of scripture memory. I memorized Colossians 3:1-4 and the paragraph seemed to surface every time I was in a decision or a trial. I thought "dare I memorize another paragraph?" Same blessing. "Dare I memorize a chapter?" Indeed I could and I did. My giant intellect then surmised, "Could I possibly memorize chapter two?" Indeed I did. "Three?" Yes. "Four?" Aha! A book I memorized! From that point I committed to memorize the New Testament epistles. At the time I was 23. Today I can still call them up and brush them off. And preaching was like having access to a computer (and the mind works faster than a computer) at all times.

And another thing that happened at this time – which I might add was my one token year as a bona-fide single – was that I found a church. My Methodist roommate Mark Wilson had attended a Lay Witness Mission at Asbury United Methodist. God had truly brought revival to that church and I began to attend there. The pastor worked formerly for Billy Graham. The laymen were good men and like father figures to me. The women were like surrogate

mothers. They gave me the first church home I ever had. Asbury formed some of the happiest memories of all my Christian experience.

The biggest thing God did, however, was to line me up with “an help meet for me” (KJV).

My girlfriend took a job in Springtown, Texas as a Phys. Ed teacher and moved there. I was on spiritual steroids but she was in a desert. I had totally transformed my ambitions and goals but she had not really “set up” or hardened spiritually. What was important to her was a distraction to me and she began to feel jealous about the new passion in my life. We slowly and surely were reaching the only crisis our relationship ever had and I could tell that it was going to jeopardize both our lives. We were heading different directions for the first time. The handwriting was on the wall. We broke up after four years. I cried like a baby. She went on to marry an electrical engineer and is wonderfully happy which delights me to no end. God had other plans for me.

There was a girl in our Crusade group named Teresa Newman. She was the “go to” girl when Crusade needed anything done. She was steady, purposeful, strong, determined, and focused. The girls in Crusade circled around her. She was a natural leader. We found ourselves praying together, serving together, and learning together. Then being together, then dreaming together. We were one. Our lives ran together like two rivers. We knew that we were meant for each other. College had broken us both. My conversion and her renewed devotion were kindled almost simultaneously. We had one token date so people wouldn’t gossip because we knew we were going to be married. We were yoked in devotion to Christ. She would be the best of wives, of daughter-in-laws, of mothers, grandmothers, mother-in-laws, friends and co-workers. She would be my conscience, my rock, my sounding board, organizer, bookkeeper, nurse, counselor, accountant and comfort. She would be my lover. She would inspire the Song of Solomon series.

She came in the spring of 1974. By August she would be Teresa Nelson.

I continued to read and grow there in my upstairs hovel on McCormack Street. God brought engagement after engagement as I would go out in evangelistic excursions all around North Texas. I even went to the only leprosarium in the continental U.S. down at Carville, Louisiana and spoke to all those folks struggling with leprosy. That was an eye-opener to see saints rejoicing amidst dying by inches. I have never forgotten those people in Carville. I also spoke in Atlanta Federal Penitentiary – The Big House. Teresa had, through an organization, written to a prisoner in Atlanta named Buddy Wright who was a Christian. She told him about me – a gen-u-ine pro-fessional Christian speaker and the next thing I knew I had an invite and next thing I was in Atlanta Federal. Thank you Teresa! It was the farthest pole from the saints of Carville but God was letting me taste of all places where pain and people might find themselves.

David said “my times are in Thy hands” (Ps. 31). The clockwork of our lives is arranged by God. My life has always “lurched” from chapter to chapter with time in between to grow and fill out. And so often it is the innocent, seeming harmless events that propel me into a new direction.

Asbury Methodist had a spring revival in 1974. The father of a high school buddy of mine was speaking. Reverend Bob Young had moved from Waco to the Dallas area, found out I attended Asbury, had become an evangelist responsible for half of the entire earth (Remember "Christ To The World?") and asked me to give my testimony which I did. The next thing I knew the laymen realized the church needed a college minister. They, hearing my one-time ten minute testimony, realized my e-normous ability and asked me and my bride to come in September '74 and be the college director at Asbury United Methodist Church behind the McDonalds on University Drive in Denton, Texas with a bona-fide check for gen-u-ine U.S. currency wrote twiced a month!

This offer not only came at a time when I was looking to be married and would need a somewhat more stable environment for an oilman's daughter and a somewhat better accommodation than my humble station on McCormack Street which I shared with a hairy-legged trainer and his Saint Bernard, Abigail. But it also came as I had begun to make an enormously important observation – that the biggest impact I could make (and I was down deep a revolutionary looking for a revolutionary cause) was not in evangelism where one added souls but in discipleship where one could multiply disciples. Asbury perfectly coincided with that revelation.

Over John Flack's protests I took the job.

Sadly I began to notice some things in John that proved his ultimate undoing. I learned lessons about ministerial disaster.

John liked money and the luxury it brought. But John liked leisure and did not like authority. Those are deadly combinations. As a result John would get into get rich quick schemes. He found a way to put his money in a trust and be paid out of the trust and not have to pay taxes. Years later a visit came from the IRS wanting to talk with me about information concerning John Flack. I said, "I hope John's not in trouble." They said, "So does he."

- Shortly after, John left the country for South Africa.
- He returned divorced from his second marriage. He had blown up to well over 300 pounds.
- He lived alone in a trailer in Albuquerque as an exterminator.
- He died shortly after of heart and lung problems.
- Less than ten attended his funeral.
- A Dallas pastor who knew him preached a message about John to his entire church about the peril of a Christian life with no doctrinal discipline. John was a tragedy.

John was the first Christian I had ever seen get affiliated with healing and tongues. He began attending Beverly Hills Baptist in Dallas (the first Baptists to go Charismatic) and then to Bob Tilton's church, Word of Faith, that ended in scandal. He and I had a teacher/student conflict. The Charismatic health/wealth ideology destroyed his personal

walk, integrity, family and ministry. It successfully shut down his reputation and his ministerial career. It formed in me a lifelong antipathy against Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement. We separated.

Asbury provided me focus. It forced me to study and to exegete the Bible and exposit its truth. It gave me time to study. It provided me with my first church family. Dick Atkinson, the pastor, gave me freedom to study and teach and disciple. Asbury forced me to develop a ministerial philosophy and also how to be in submission to a pastor and church government. Most important it taught me how to counsel and shepherd a Christian and Christians. It gave me a peaceful surrounding just to grow.

That summer of '74 I was an official college pastor making 400 bucks a month living in a church duplex. I was readying it for a new bride that would arrive on August the 23rd. We were married on a Friday night in Harleton, Texas. My buddy, John Bowles, left after being my best man for Virginia Beach, Virginia, to be a junior high coach. When he drove off with his wife Sarah, he and I cried like babies. I cried all the way to Tyler.

Teresa and I honeymooned on a Friday night and Saturday at the Ramada Inn in Tyler. We ate at Whataburger on Saturday. On Sunday we said, "Let's go home," and we did. We both wanted to get to work. Monday we were in the ministry together.

It was September 1974.

The Guy in the Tie
Part XIV D.T.S., A Blind Alley, and a man named Mel

From the fall of '74 to the fall of '77 Teresa and I together built the college program of Asbury Methodist. We started with about 15 students and by '77 had 160. We built it on Bible exposition, systematic theology and "mini churches." The first two I got by driving to Believer's Chapel in Dallas, off Preston, picking up all the tapes they would give me of Lewis Johnson, Haddon Robinson, and Bill McRae – all Dallas Seminary men – and I would unashamedly adapt the information to my college audience and give it. "Mini churches" were the innovation in the 70s of Gene Getz, also a DTS prof, who pastored in Richardson the first of many Fellowship Bible Churches. I was learning via these men and by a fellow in California that had just hit the airways named John MacArthur. All of these men had an unashamed confidence in the inerrancy of scripture.

It was at this time that "the battle for the Bible" had begun. Was the Bible fully inspired or only inspired in "spiritual" things but wrong on science and history. This was known as the "partial inspiration" or sometimes the "inspired purpose" view of inerrancy and it was dividing what had always been the evangelical wing of Protestantism. Another divisive thrust was new school Pentecostalism that had found its way into the church through what was called the Charismatic or Neo-Pentecostal movement. It preached a second work of salvation, but that which was subsequent was marked by a "prayer language" – speaking in tongues, that all must have. Both these errors were deadly and divisive.

The Methodist church had bought into limited inerrancy and the Charismatic movement "hook, line, 'n sinker" as a means to give life to what had become a sinking denomination.

But Asbury United Methodist in Denton took a stance. "No." As a result, in those three years we built a big new sanctuary and continued to grow. I gained a degree of notoriety as the college guy in a denomination not known for college ministries. I'll bet I spoke at every retreat center in North, East, and West Texas and to every high school and junior high Methodist kid that existed from '74-'77. My study and teaching and counseling skills got forcibly shaped and accelerated through God's providence.

I need also to share one other momentous development. I became a Calvinist. Like most Christians I began a journey from being a Pelagianist (man saves) to an Arminian (God and man together save) to a Calvinist (God saves). I interpreted "predestination" as being "God's choosing those whom He knows will choose Him" – which makes election a moot point. A young girl in our college department named Nancy Hobson came to me with her boyfriend saying that they had been to a Bible study where the teacher defined predestination as "God choosing whom He would save." I immediately yelled, "That is a coward's doctrine!" Soon after as I was reading through my book of systematic theology, I came to the issue of predestination. It was not my nifty rationale that Mr. Chafer set forth but (gulp) Nancy Hobson's. I rethought my doctrine in accordance to scripture; not my own reasoning. I was now a Calvinist . . . and a Calvinist still to this day in desperate search for one Nancy Hobson to offer her an apology.

The three years at Asbury were warm enjoyable years. Pastor Dick Atkinson gave me my freedom and just said "succeed." He did not try to administrate me. I had to make no meetings. I studied and taught and grew spiritually. He was the third man I had been placed underneath. God was teaching me the lesson of being the number two man – the most vital lesson one must learn before becoming the number one. Life was peaceful. Life was sweet.

But as always "My times are in Thy hands." God had plans that would invade my space.

I saw a fellow come to Christ name Bob Peters. Bob was a 3.9 pre-med at North Texas. I began discipling him and teaching him. The thing was he was as sharp as and sharper than me and could learn just as fast or faster. It wasn't long until I ran out of material. Bob and I would jog and lift weights together and one day we were running on the road out to the Denton airport. It was there on the bridge to the airport that it hit me that I needed to be taught myself. My learning had been mostly at a distance but I needed to learn what I needed but didn't know enough to know what I needed. The thought came like a thunderbolt. "Seminary: Dallas Theological Seminary." I can to this day show you on that bridge where it was that the thought hit me. "Dallas Theological Seminary."

"The secret of the Lord is for those who fear Him." (Ps. 25:14). God will always guide the faithful man.

The next day I drove down to DTS on Swiss Avenue in downtown Dallas. They had a 60 hour program called the MABS that did not include languages. The 130 hour Masters of Theology seemed that it would interrupt the ministry in which I was already immersed. After four years of evangelism and discipleship, I could not see taking four years away from the ministry. All I wanted was to learn my Bible and to know what I did not.

I literally drove to DTS and sat in my car to fill out the application. I went back in and handed it to them. I said, "What do I need now?" They gave me character references and I drove straight to Denton and hand delivered them. They sent them in and I waited. It turned out that because I was in the ministry the seminary wanted me to do the 130 hours. I gave them the above reasons but they weren't sure. I finally said, "Hey, I'm a Methodist." They let me in. For five summers I would enjoy one of the most blessed periods of my Christian life as a student at Dallas Theological Seminary. I was the model student, the kind that seminaries were created for. I wasn't the kid who wants a degree so he can be legalized to preach. I was a man with four years of experience in evangelism and discipleship. I had proven myself under authority. I had already established ministerial credibility in proven fruitfulness. I had done some of the most faith-challenging things that one could do and had succeeded. I wanted seminary to be an accelerant to an already kindled fire. For five years every single class I took in the summers (which were the times of my attendance) I taught at the church once the fall began. I can tell you every chapel speaker at DTS in those years and what the speaker spoke about. I would get to seminary an hour before class and sit in the coffee shop and just listen to professors visiting with each other and with students. I absorbed like an amoeba straight through the cell membrane. When I heard it I had it. Bible survey, systematic theology, Bible study

methods, Romans, apologetics, the prophets – I could not learn fast enough. The greatest delight, however, was my discovery of church history. The enlightenment of watching in history how doctrine shapes events both good and bad. The domino effect of theology and its concessions to human ideas or its resistance. Philosophy or theology. The winner gets the culture. History and the evolution of philosophy (or devolution) became my delight then hobby then passion.

But one of the major directives of my life came just two weeks after I began my first summer.

Asbury Methodist as a United Methodist Church, held to the connectional system of having the church higher ups direct the pastors between the churches. At any given time a church's pastor could leave and another arrive – who you did not know.

The Asbury pastor was Dick Atkinson, a conservative, evangelical pastor who had guided Asbury from being in the red to being a top Methodist church. But in May of 1977 the Methodist leadership decided to move Dick Atkinson to Dallas and to bring a fellow from Greenville to pastor Asbury – a fellow who was the poster-boy for liberalism. I found out later that this fellow protested coming to Asbury because of Asbury's fundamental stance. The powers that be said no, and to Asbury came a classic theological liberal. Brilliant move!

Once again I looked to heaven. Teresa and I had just had our first child, Benjamin, born January of '76. We had helped build a big new sanctuary. Asbury had the largest college group of any Methodist church in Texas, as I understood. And I was two weeks into DTS. And here came a divinely allowed enemy of everything Asbury stood for. I looked heavenward and waited.

The minister came. In retrospect I could have handled it more sensitively. My problem is that I have an innate rage for whatever raises its face against God. Whether liberalism or the cults or egalitarianism or Romanism or arminianism or whatever. It's like someone has insulted my father and I tend to react and flash hot. Anyway this is what I did. I told Teresa I was going to talk with him and "if this guy denies the scripture you be ready to pack." I asked him if he held to inerrancy. He balked. The deity of Christ? He said no. I assured him he was not a Christian. He was insulted that I even asked. I told him I could not send my students to hear someone who does not hold to Christ's divinity. He said he didn't care. I said we could not walk together unless we agreed. He said he wasn't leaving. I said I would. Teresa and I had one month to vacate.

Teresa and Benjamin moved to East Texas to be with her family while I finished my first summer at DTS. I slept in a single man's upstairs garage apartment off Fry Street and I wondered what God was doing. I was the good guy. I was on the floor.

By the time I was finishing the summer I was thinking, "What am I going to do from here on?" First Baptist Dallas wanted to talk to me about being a youth director. A Methodist church in Abilene wanted to talk to me about a position as a college director. I continued that summer going back and forth to Teresa's folks out in Harleton between Marshall and

Longview. I would go on long runs down the pine tree lined roads just running and thinking and praying. And then I would wait. For almost three months I waited.

There was a church that had begun in Denton in '76. In the early 70s a fellow that ran the bookstore at Dallas Seminary named Bob Schaeffer had been coming on Sundays to fill in the pulpit for a group of Methodists that had split off from First Methodist. They were called Bell Avenue Memorial. There were just a handful of them but they had a church building, and had affiliated themselves with the Southern Methodists. As they were looking for someone permanent, Bob Schaeffer mentioned to Mel Sumrall, a 50 year old student (a 2nd career man), who had left a career in the steel industry for the pastorate, if he would like to take over the pulpit duties. Mel and his wife Patty said they would. So they made the drive from Dallas every Sunday to meet with the older group of Methodists. Mel not only filled in but soon the church was actually growing. Their church had begun to be a safe haven from theological liberalism but was now attracting younger couples and college students. There had been a very perceivable reaction against the 60s by the early 70s – an evangelical, fundamental and at times charismatic return to the stability of the Bible. Bell Avenue Memorial reflected that reaction in the State University town of Denton, Texas. Mel had no experience in the pulpit but he grabbed some young ambitious students from DTS and they came with him to minister. Mel simply began teaching what the seminary had taught him and before long there was a buzz all around Denton that a bunch of DTS guys were expositing the Word of God at some place called Bell Avenue Memorial. Its success was in perfect sync with how God had blessed the ministry at Asbury. Two DTS oddities had arrived in Denton at the same time – an ex-college football player cut by Hayden Fry and an ex-steel worker. I had never met anyone from Bell Avenue but I rejoiced over their church that was growing daily.

But then the word reached me that these Methodists had had their own split. As Bell Avenue continued to grow, tensions rose as the original founders began to dissolve into the larger group. Tension arose as Mel began to rise as a pastor who cast a vision for church growth instead of just a friendly fellowship. But the greatest tension came when Mel was asked not to invite men to be saved but to “enter into the fellowship of the church.” Mel Sumrall said no, and could see the handwriting on the wall. He said, “Let’s part as friends.” In 1976 Mel and 12 others began Denton Bible Church, meeting in a room on the North Texas campus.

Denton, Texas had a Bible Church.

And this was all happening as Asbury split at the same time over biblical authority. Most of those at Asbury went to the newly formed Denton Bible.

Teresa and I were together on the weekends in Harleton. I had only heard reports of Denton Bible but had never been there. Until one day at DFW airport, getting on the airport transport, a familiar face stood up. Ned Wilson was a Pan Am pilot at Asbury who had gone to Denton Bible, met Mel and liked his visionary spirit. Ned saw me and said, “Tommy, I want you to meet Mel Sumrall.” Ned saw to it. He arranged for Mel and I to have lunch at Denny’s.

A brief parenthesis here. Just before our meeting, what I believe was the most important providential event in Denton Bible's history occurred.

I had a class that summer with Dr. John Hannah on the history of the American church. Part of that study was on the great American revivals of 1720, 1800, and 1858. The last one was called Layman's Prayer Revival of 1858. Beginning in New York with one Dutch Reformed Layman named Jeremiah Calvin Lanphier who gathered six to pray on a Monday at noon, then 20 the next week, then 40, then 100, then the entire church was filled, then a YMCA, then other churches, then the entire city, then Philadelphia, Boston and throughout the entire country that carried on through the Civil War.

I told the story of Lanphier's prayer meeting to a group of single men approximately my age on a Sunday night when I happened, for some reason, to be in Denton. We played Putt-Putt: myself, Bob Peters, Johnny Jones, Joe Lyle, Joe Goetz, Mark Jensen and Greg Talkington. We got back to Joe Goetz's house on Alice Avenue, laid around on the floor (as single men have no furniture) and I told them what I had learned at DTS in church history. I told them of 1858 and it seemed like something moved into the room. A sense of God's greatness and that what could once happen God still could do should He be so pleased as men availed in prayer. We said on cue, "Let's do it!" We began meeting every Sunday night at 7:00 until 8:00. We laid on the floor. We took no prayer requests but prayed for lasting revival. Soon that house was filled with men from Asbury and men from the fledgling Denton Bible. That prayer group on Sunday night continued into the '90s until the need for an evening service shifted into church wide prayer the first Thursday of every month at 6:00 am. It formed the power grid of a Denton Bible that would soon be the mingling of the tributaries of both churches. Prayer for the impossible was in place.

That having been said, it was a noon appointment when I went to Denny's restaurant to meet this man I had only heard of: this man, at age 52, was the oldest graduate in the history of Dallas Seminary. I walked in, there in the summer of 1977. I was walking by faith. I knew not the future. Neither did Mel. We both had longings, weaknesses and talents. We both were inexperienced in pastoral work. I walked in and a slim man in white loafers (1977 mind you) and wire rimmed glasses, a big smile and a Marine handshake stood up and came up to me. "Tommy, I'm Mel Sumrall."

The Guy in the Tie
Part XV “Co-Pastor”

My greatest ministerial joy without doubt has been to watch what God has done since 1976 at Denton Bible Church. Its three successive sanctuaries sit along highway 380 as testimonies of growth. The first built in 1980, one from 1993 and the one from 2005. Each larger and more accommodating than the last.

But more than that has been the impact of this church that has never moved from its initial foundations.

- Inerrancy
- Calvinism
- Pre-millenianism
- The pre-trib rapture
- Elder rule
- Discipleship and church planting
- Missions
- Church discipline
- Giving prompted through grace
- Freedom from legalism; or gracious living
- Commitment to a strong Sunday School for children
- Sending men and women to seminary for future ministry

And most important, the exposition of the Bible from the pulpit, verse by verse, followed by a devotion to prayer and historic worship.

If I sound boastful it's because I am. But it's a boasting of what God has accomplished through His grace and might. I stand in awe.

It has always amused me of where Denton Bible is located – on the corner of University Drive and Nottingham. University running east and west, back and forth, like the secular tides that control a “University” town with two state colleges. And then Nottingham running north and south up and down. Nottingham was the central town in Robin Hood as Robin and his merry men resisted evil, collected fellow rebels, and waited for the coming of Richard to restore the righteous kingdom. Such is the purpose of the church as Nottingham crosses the broad road of the University.

The impact of Denton Bible has been the result of 40 years of constant prayer beginning with the prayer meeting out of which it was born in '77.

Young Guns, “The Program” for discipleship for young men and the Young Women's discipleship, its female counterpart, has sent out over a thousand students into the seminaries and the business and educational worlds.

The BTCP, Bible Training Center for Pastors, has trained a thousand international pastors and prepared them for ministry where otherwise they would have no training.

The BTCL, Bible Training Center for Leaders, the women's counterpart to the BTCP, has trained over 200 women at this present time for cutting edge leadership.

The Missions Training Institute has prepared numbers within the church for foreign missions, sent out by SERVE Missions, Denton Bible's own missions sending agency with our missionaries in twenty plus countries.

The 2:7 program for discipleship has produced hundreds and hundreds who have and will reproduce disciple-makers with no limit in sight.

VISION Ministries from DBC is the central leader in Denton County for compassionate outreach to the poor.

Shiloh Garden is the largest community garden in the country.

Mercy Heart outreach to the families of the incarcerated is the largest in the country.

Denton Bible media outreach reaches the four corners.

All this happened in about 40 years.

Why do I at this point recount 40 years of ministry? Because this Part XV is called "co-pastor." It is about the most important meeting in my life – my meeting with Mel Sumrall – the meeting and melding that shaped Denton Bible. Never were there two more unqualified men to begin a great work. Never did a church begin with a more doomed to failure forecast. We were the church no one planned. The church no one intended. The church begun stillborn.

Mel, a WWII veteran in the Marines had no plans for the Christian ministry. He was content with Patty, his college sweetheart, and their five children as he was the successful steel superintendent of CFNI Steel of Pueblo, Colorado. Until one day his ten month old baby daughter, Pamela, became feverish at 9:00 am and by 3:00 pm she had passed away from a virus that damaged her heart. Mel, like all men do, blamed himself and plunged into a two year clinical depression. God's grace and the mentoring of a Dallas Seminary grad in Pueblo brought Mel out of it. And he came to realize that his now greatest joy came from passing on to others what had been passed on to him. Discipleship and the teaching of God's Word literally redeemed his soul from the pit of despair . . .

As Christ had indeed brought me back from the darkness.

Mel had no plans to be a pastor. Neither did I.

Mel had no plans to begin a church. Neither did I.

We were both cast out by liberal Methodism.

We were survivors.

He pastored . . . then he taught.

I taught . . . then I pastored.
We were dreamers.
He was a quarter-miler that ran through pain.
I was a quarterback with two broken wrists, a blown out knee, cut by Hayden Fry.
We both would not quit, had never quit. Both raised hard.

We met that day at Denny's, front booth on the right – against the window. We talked about what he wanted to do. There was no decision . . . no doubt . . . our souls were one.

Teresa and I that week visited the church of about 100 folks meeting at the Optimist Gym. It didn't look like much but it had the one thing I had been longing for. No boundaries. No restrictions. We could do it the way we saw fit.

Like paragraph 2 . . . page 1

I said, "Mel, can you give me any money just so I can tell my wife I have an actual job?" It was great. I would be making 60% of the church's founder! Mel made \$600 a month and I made \$400! Big money! Often Sunday morning was spent counting the money in the Optimist Gym kitchen (our office) to see if we got paid.

But once again God's plan and His providential actions were in sync. Months before Asbury was pulled out from under me, Teresa's father and mother decided to begin moving their assets to their five children. They began with a small percent and I thought, "Ah, what a nice gesture." But it came to between seven and nine hundred dollars a month! In 1977 that was more than any paycheck I had ever received! It providentially allowed us to come on at Denton Bible. I was discovering a lifelong maxim – "Faithful people 'get lucky'." Or as the Bible says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall make your ways straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

So in September of 1977 I became the "co-pastor" – a term Mel insisted I be called – of Denton Bible Church. Teresa and I looked for our first gen-u-ine house to live in and one opened up right next door to Mel and Patty on Selene Street in north Denton. We would be next door neighbors and in each other's back pockets for the next 2 ½ years. He and Patty became Benjamin's surrogate grandparents. On one snowy day we couldn't find our two year old. We looked outside and there in the snow, footprints led right to Mel's door. We followed them and there was Benjamin sitting on a stool being fed whatever was on hand. He was hungry. On another occasion we found him at the backyard fence yelling "Mr. Pat! Do you have a banana?" Patty came in her curlers and fed him a banana through the fence like a gibbon.

It was providential that Mel and I stayed that close because neither one of us would have made it without the other. Remember, as I said before, Denton Bible was not a church plant. It was never intended. It happened as liberal theology crushed two strong rising evangelical works in progress – Asbury and Bell Avenue. Denton Bible was the orphan – the surviving waif. Denton Bible was mine and Mel's worst case projection. It was a survival plan. It happened because nothing else was possible. It was the young Conan

orphaned in a world that wanted him dead. It was Moses in the Nile in a basket with crocodiles and alien, hostile Egyptians passing by as he cried in the reeds. We could have died often and often times you leaned with your ear to the infant church's chest to listen for a heartbeat.

I often wondered if that was why Mel stayed with the initial 12 people in '76 who began the church. Mel had lost one ten month old girl. By God, he would not lose another.

A Bible church in Dallas looked at putting in a church plant in Denton and perhaps Denton Bible coming under the umbrella. They decided not to come in with us. Another church had a program to help new church plants financially but turned us down because we were such a young church with so many college students. They thought we would not be around for long.

No one wanted this little fellowship.

We knew we needed a building for permanence and children's ministries so we could attract families. We had no building because we had no money. We had no money because we had no couples with gen-u-ine bank accounts. And we had no families because we had no building. Doomed. Catch 22. Chinese finger trap. "The more we struggle the worse it will get!" So we figured.

We looked for a building to rent to get our numbers up enough to generate some kind of capital. We looked at a Seventh Day Adventist Church to use on Sundays – nope. A Presbyterian Church to use on Saturdays. They said, "Do you think Denton really needs another church?" Mel said, "We need someone who will preach the word!" Never challenge an ex-marine. We looked at a Hispanic church – nope. And we tried to buy a Methodist church that had grown so small that they decided to sell it to us. But the night they were to vote on it, the wife of the church's board chairman fell over dead from a heart attack. They revived her only for her to die a short while later but in the interim the church decided to keep their building.

Failed again.

As some people became frustrated they began to leave. Not because they were not being taught the word or were not given a chance to disciple others but because it was just hard to build a sense of community in a place that was not your own.

On one occasion one of the elders said, "People are leaving like rats off a ship." We wondered if it was worth it. I said to Mel words I still remember today. "Nobody tells me to take my Bible and git." Mel said, "Amen." We decided to redouble our prayer. The women began praying on Sunday nights at an apartment and sometimes the men would come and serenade them. The elders decided to begin praying – Wednesday mornings at 6:00am. But one elder lived in Dallas so we would all meet at the parking lot at First Baptist Lewisville. Mel had a car that looked like the mothership. We called it "Old Ironsides." It was a 1960s something. Mel had horrible allergies and had to wear a surgical

mask to prayer. He looked and sounded like Darth Vader. The elder from Dallas drove a pickup so all of us would sit in his pickup bed and pray while Mel would lean out his driver's window and pray with his mask on. One morning as we were praying a police car pulled up to see what was happening there in the dark. Our answer, "We're praying." Said the cop, "Who are you?" Said we, "Elders of a Bible church." Said the cop, "Which one?" Said we, "Denton." Made perfect sense. The cop drove off shaking his head looking at Mel wheezing in his mask, with his head out the window praying in the dark in Lewisville for his church in Denton. No wonder the cop was confused.

We all got simplified out, started laughing and ended up going home. Things looked bleak.

So Mel and I began to pray for 40 straight days – 4:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m. to ask that God move this great mountain and cast it into the sea. We committed to pray for 40 days. I would walk next door and Mel would greet me at the door. I had trained him in the art of coffee-making so he had some bracing brew of the blessed bean ready to go. Why 4:00 a.m.? I think we wanted to go to God when everyone else was asleep and we would be the only ones up! Actually we only prayed for 26 days because Mel got pneumonia and I had to let him stay in bed so's he wouldn't die. We prayed for two hours each morning and Mel wrote everything down on a yellow legal pad. Basically we asked God for everything we needed and wanted and dreamed of but did not have the ability to pull off ourselves. Everything we prayed God has done or is doing. Despair produced in us a sense of total reliance.

I might add that there was another reason why we did not see explosive growth. Mel and I both had an edge. Mel, at 50 plus, felt a passion to make his life count and a responsibility to those who had no Christian guidance. Thus, Mel had a violent irritation with Christians who had known Christ for years and years yet simply enjoyed retirement and comforts and grandkids. He felt they had forsaken God's Great Commission and Mel could make things uncomfortable for them. Mel's Christianity had an edge and a bite to it. Because of that, people would rather go somewhere where a self-centered life was acceptable.

I was of the same substance but my area of irritation was with error and Biblical slothfulness. Theological compromise, better known as liberalism, enraged my soul and embittered my spirit. I felt, around those who compromised biblical inerrancy, as though I was around traitors and turncoats. I felt it around Roman Catholics as those who were enemies of the grace and free salvation of God.

The Charismatic movement, by the mid 70s, was in full swing and evangelicalism was dividing over the haves and have nots. Those on the Varsity who had received the secondary act of salvation in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues and could coach others in how to acquire their prayer language. The smug superiority of this divisive and emotionally manipulative movement put me on the alert continually as churches were dividing everywhere. The Oklahoma based gospel of health and prosperity was bringing a grotesque fleshliness to the holiness of the gospel. Charlatans flourished in its wake like dandelions. The Local Church of Witness Lee and his easternization of the faith was creating havoc. Christians were exhorted to leave their churches – the Great Harlot – for

the true church of Witness Lee. The Way International in its abject denial of the deity of Jesus Christ was rising, as well as Garner Ted Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God.

But like all of Pharaoh's magicians their "foolishness was obvious to all" (2 Tim. 3) and were eventually swallowed by Aaron's rod, but they were a thorn in the side of the saints. All this being said, the little flock of Christians who met at the Optimist Gym had to have about them a rod and staff because the lion and the bear seemed to be on every street corner. I had a nasty protective streak toward orthodoxy. Mel had a nasty streak toward Christian lethargy. Because of this Denton Bible developed an edge. The ignorant, undisciplined, and worldly would feel the heat from the Denton Bible pulpit. I glory in the fact, however, no predators entered. No splits occurred and soft Protestant lethargy did not co-exist peacefully. We taught books expositionally verse by verse. We taught systematic theology from the pulpit and in Sunday school, as well as apologetics. You were expected to make disciples. With this, however, came a reputation. We were seen as dogmatic, harsh, cold, unloving, unwelcoming, judgmental, narrow, proud, and most of all intellectual and legalistic in our exhortation toward quiet times. But we also had another reputation. If you wanted Bible, faithfulness to Reformed Orthodoxy, and fundamentalism as well as a chance to be able to disciple others – we were your church, but we grew slowly.

Mel was by now a mere 54. I was a sassy 28. We were defiant and acidic. But we deeply believed in what we were doing. We wanted a committed fellowship. We grew to about 200 in the Optimist Gym. Mel and I were now making 800 bucks a month. We both could almost hope to own a gen-u-ine home someday.

To give us the possibility of gaining some families (as DBC still looked like Children of the Corn) we moved to the chapel at Camp Copass on the outskirts of Denton, a Baptist Camp. As a result our group of 200 grew to a group of 150! Great decision making on our part!

Still we wondered how we would get a building. So we prayed.

Then one day out of nowhere two old brothers in Denton spoke to one of our elders and said that they had about a three acre lot that they were going to sell on University Drive. They had not listed it, and told the elder who managed a radio station in case he knew someone who might want land on University. The elder said, "Lemme get back." They were going to sell it for \$43,000. Our yearly budget was not \$43,000. But out of the blue a man outside our church said he would give us \$25,000 if we could raise \$18,000. Of the approximately 150 in the church most were students or singles beneath the poverty line. Some students pawned their instruments. Some took out loans. Others were "don't ask, don't tell." I didn't want to know. I don't know how, but we did it. We even built a church financial thermometer to measure it. By 1980 we were the proud owners of three acres of the most overgrown hackberries, scrub oaks, and saw briars that you have ever seen. "The thing came about hurriedly because it was of the Lord." (2 Chron. 29:36)

We had land but how do we build a building? A banker in town heard of us and our plight and said his bank would give us the money needed at federal interest plus 1%. The building would be one that we as a church would supply the brickwork, framing, sheet

rocking, taping and bedding, insulation, ground work for sewers, painting, landscaping – in other words everything but the foundation, steel beams, plumbing, electrical and metal roof. We could do it for \$90,000. An old gentleman whose son attended was our general contractor for free. First we would have to clear three acres that had not been touched by human hands since creation (no joke). We could have paid for a dozer and front end loader and truck to haul the brush off but we had no money for such frills. So on Saturdays at 8:00 a.m. the men (i.e. mostly collegians) would gather with machetes – to hack briars – and white mule gloves, and chain saws for trees and stumps. The brush we would throw on Jack George junior's flatbed truck, tie it down, and haul it to the dump. The ladies would show up at noon with D.P. and sandwiches then we would go home. Four hours of work a week and before long we had it cleared. Then we hired a backhoe to take out stumps.

At every place in what is now The Sumrall Center, I can tell you the persons in 1980 who worked at each spot. By 1981, a church for 400 max with two bathrooms, one office, and a few rooms for kids – we had no youth program – was up and going. The first Sunday, Easter of '81, we had 180 people. Denton Bible finally had a resting place after five years of wandering.

By the summer of '82 we had gone to a second service and had doubled to 400 people. In the American culture you are a church when you have real estate and a building. Only then are you seen as legitimate and permanent and "here to stay." People no longer felt threatened to come to the church in the gym or the church in the campground. I was ready to graduate DTS and we had built a strong group of college and singles and young couples by teaching small groups in systematic theology, church history, Bible exposition, apologetics, Christianity vs philosophy, world views and Bible study methods. All of the things I had learned in seminary in the summers I would teach in the fall and spring. But I made an almost fatal error.

The reason I took what I did at seminary was to heighten my ability in evangelism, discipleship, and ministry. But I did not push this with my students and young folks at the church. I just assumed. As a result the knowledge I put into many of them did not turn out a more durable, humble, sharper evangelist but merely one that was cleverer in conversation and of a more critical mindset. Their education produced pride and an independent spirit. Many became like adolescents toward their parent. They became erudite coffee house chatterers but not emissaries of Christ and His church. One went on to seminary, came to work for the church, collected a following and led our first church splintering. He bit the hand, arm and shoulder of the one who fed him.

As this began to unfold, those who I had devoted the best of my life became the greatest threats to our church. As a result I came to know a pain in the ministry that was akin to what Paul would have felt from the Corinthians and Galatians. Betrayed.

It was such a sense of failure that I thought to myself, "If this is the best that my best can produce then I need to quit and do something different." I almost did.

It was 1984 – an ominous year if you ever read George Orwell. We had been in our building for three years and I was a seminary grad co-pastoring now over 400 folks and yet as Denton Bible was taking on a maturing status, I was in my lowest time. I had never known the feeling of ministerial failure but now it dogged my steps.

It's been said that if Satan had a garage sale he would never get rid of the tool of "discouragement" because it has served him so well. He was working me over with it. But I had learned a lesson that was to last a lifetime – "Knowledge (especially in the young) without evangelism, will produce arrogance." Never have I made that mistake again.

My remedy to discouragement would bring me a spiritual intimacy with God in the fall of '84 that would let me turn the greatest corner of my life and direct me now for over 30 years.

It would come from far away in a tiny church in Scotland.

The Guy in the Tie
Part XVI "Come Closer"

It's been said that everyone wants to be Irish. I know in my case I always had a fascination with Ireland. Maybe because it was where my maternal grandmother's side came from or because my favorite movie was "The Quiet Man." Or just maybe because it looked so peaceful. Like the land that time forgot. Anyway, I always had a longing to go there.

By the summer of '84 I wanted to get away somewhere, anywhere to just think. So when Mike Brown, a single carpenter in our church said that he was going to Ireland, Scotland and England to bike for four weeks and asked if I would I like to go with him, I did a very un-Tommy Nelson like thing – I said yes. I don't like traveling. I don't even like leisure. I like anything that will contribute to the demonstrable progress of my life and its goals. But in this case it meant getting away. Maybe it was a longing to see the land of my origin, maybe because there was no threat of disaster by going with a fellow who had done this before. But it was almost like an Aslan-like voice was calling me to come over. So in August of '84, Mike Brown and I left for Shannon, Ireland with our bicycles to go up and across Ireland to Dublin in two weeks, then into Scotland for a week and then to Canterbury and England for two more.

I took with me just an Old Testament. I had memorized many of the epistles and so I decided to review them as I biked and then at night to read in the Old Testament. The text that kept going through my mind was from Genesis 45:4, "And Joseph said to his brothers 'Please come closer.'" That phrase, "please come closer," just went into my soul because that was what I wanted to do. All day we would bike through the most beautiful country on earth and at night I would read and read and pray. Sometimes nights would be on moonlit Galway Bay; other nights on the rugged Irish coast of the Atlantic and sometimes by its brooks.

For two weeks we went through Ireland and then we took a ferry into Scotland and began biking toward Edinburg. While at Edinburg I decided to attend a Scottish Presbyterian church. So I began biking into the city. I came to a backstreet and to a church that looked like it had known better times. The service was about to begin so I slipped in the back. The organist was playing a song that was kind of Denton Bible's theme song and favorite hymn, "Like a River Glorious Is God's Perfect Peace." After being out of church and away from all Christians for more than two weeks, I was lonely for the things of God. It was a strange thing that happened. Never had it happen since. As soon as I heard the music of God's people the tears began to come. They sang a hymn and I could barely sing. They read a responsive reading but I could barely read. An old pastor stood to read but was so old he could not stand so he sat on a stool. Even his opening of his Bible moved me as I could hear its "thud" as he opened it on the pulpit. Only 17 people were there. All well over 70; most of them women and all widows or widowers. I sat in the back, in the shadows. A lone American. A lone younger man of 33 (a good age to be crucified) in his bicycle clothing, self—consciously not in a coat and tie.

The old pastor looked at his 17 people and one alien figure in the back pew. He read the text for that Sunday morning.

“Our text is Genesis 45:4. “And Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Please come closer’.””

I caught my breath. The hair went up on my neck. He preached but I do not remember anything he said. I had received my message. God had taken me around the world to a church where to this day I could not tell you where it was, what it was, or who anyone was who was there that day. God only had me hear one sentence – “Come closer.” It was as if I was floundering exhausted at sea and He appeared saying “It is I. Be not afraid.” That was all I needed as Jesus found me – the needle in the haystack. “I am with you always.” As Peter and Paul in prison, He knew where I was. As the Savior in the wilderness and in the garden, God’s angels could minister to me. My job was simply to “come closer” to my Joseph who had shown me mercy.

The next day, however, was just as interesting. My biking companion and I went to see one of the Christian attractions in Edinburg – the narrow three-story house of John Knox, the great Scottish Calvinist and reformer who brought Presbyterian church government to Scotland. It was early September and much of the tourist traffic was gone. We entered Knox’s house and only one couple was there. I could tell that the woman was an American (you just can) and I noticed her husband standing at the registry desk. I thought, “I’ve seen him” and I had. On TV. It was one of the most popular American TV evangelists of the 70s and 80s. I was amused because I knew that the man was vehemently anti-Calvinist and yet here he was in the house of a Calvinist’s Calvinist, John Knox. I thought, “Maybe he’s here to set fire to the house of Knox.” But he wasn’t. I simply noted him and moved on. We were the only ones there.

I went outside and down the street and went in a stationary store. When I came out, Lo . . . there he was again. He also had walked down the street and was sitting on what appeared to be kind of a trash can or waste basket on the curb. His yellow sweater was over his right shoulder and he was watching the pedestrians walking up the sidewalk toward him. I’m not sure what he was thinking but after the event the day before I was pretty aware of any providential occurrences. I said to myself, “God, this is too weird. I’m supposed to learn something here as well as ‘come closer’!”

The picture is still frozen in my memory from that day. The downward path from the home of a reformer to the edge of a trash can upon which he teetered. That pastor at that time had fallen into adultery. Repetitive. Only three knew. The pastor, the woman and God. God put the picture before me. I still see him balanced. Shortly after, his cover was blown and he was found out and fell in. His ministry never recovered. It is a short downward walk to a trash can.

I returned home. Mel and I by now had learned some things. No longer would we train men in Bible and theology without requiring faithfulness from them in service and evangelism.

A number of things happened when I returned. The next five years would be the most productive of my ministry. I began meeting with small groups of young men at 6:00 a.m. for study, scripture memory and accountability. These became still today some of the most faithful men I've ever disciplined. Plato said, "You cultivate what you honor." No longer did I honor simply learning because I cultivated only intellects. Now I honored obedience, service, and faithfulness. We began to cultivate it. Mel and I adopted a new program at the church that came from the Navigators called the 2:7 Program. It came from Colossians 2 verse 7. "... having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith just as you were instructed and overflowing with gratitude."

Students of the groups did not merely attend study but were required to do work in a workbook, have consecutive days of personal quiet times, participate in group discussion, memorize key verses, write and give one's testimony, learn to share The Bridge gospel presentation. One had to begin a prayer journal and spend a half day in prayer. There was a standard and one could be removed if the standard wasn't met. When the group dismissed after two years the students were expected to lead. The 2:7 had teeth in it. It revolutionized our church simply because it polarized and exposed those who merely made the Bible their hobby but not their life. We began to cultivate leaders. But, it did not sit well with some. It wasn't meant to. We needed a cleansing. We would become the leading church in the nation as far as 2:7 participation.

One day my phone rang. A young jazz musician from North Texas was on the other end. His name was Charles Stolfus, the One O'clock Jazz Band trombonist – i.e. the best of the best. He said he desperately wanted to grow but the church he was in moved him to the outside rail and would not invest in him. He was a frustrated kid who wasn't given a chance to play. I said to Charles that if he could find three other men and could meet at 6:00 a.m. I would take him on. Charles found the other three and became one of the best investments I ever made. He ended up going on our staff, going to Dallas Seminary and becoming the director of our Lay Institute and one of the pillars of our church. He was so promising that Teresa and I decided to build onto our home (in 1979 Mel and I both bought homes and were no longer next door rent house neighbors) and to move in young single men for "live in" discipleship. From '85 until '89 Teresa and I had ten men live with us that all became fruitful men. No longer was I producing mere theologians and debaters.

It was at this time that another lesson was learned and a hurdle was cleared. A young man had been disciplined at DBC then went on to Dallas Seminary and became the first paid staff at our church. At this same time in the mid-80s we also had in the church a group who was into a particular home school movement. Long story short this young man whose wife was our secretary did not agree with many of the premises of this particular home school movement. He sent a letter to the elders about his disagreements but closed the letter by informing us that his wife would no longer handle anything in the church that had anything to do with this home school philosophy. Mel was traveling at the time so the decision fell on me. Now I had cut my teeth in ministry by handling problems coming from the outside but this was a problem from the inside. The first such disruption I had ever handled. To complicate things this was a young man who owed his Christian life to DBC.

Basically he gave the elders an ultimatum of how things would be. I did the wrong thing. I made my second major error in leadership. An error that I still scourge myself over today. I tried to keep things peaceful. I felt that was my chief responsibility as a pastor, but I was wrong. When I and another elder met with him I tried to bring peace and to co-habit with his decision but what I had was a defiant and disrespectful staff that I was trusting with authority.

Unbeknownst, he began to gather his support.

Shortly after, we had the first and only what we would call a split. What fostered it was church discipline. An elder's wife had abandoned him. Try as we might we could not get a reason nor could we get her in any counseling. We only had one alternative after many meetings and that was to conduct church discipline.

It turned out that this young staff had more than a problem with home schoolers but also with elder rule. He resigned after our disciplining of the elder's wife and with him went a group of his young comrades.

I had learned a hard lesson. A lesson that I vowed I would never repeat. Never would I preserve the peace at the expense of placating someone in the church – whether staff, leadership or lay person – who later on could become treacherous. Forever after, the instant I smell divisiveness or disrespect, or in any sense an ultimatum, I go straight to the source. I ask for an explanation. It is one thing to be disagreed with because disagreement will occur in any group or family. But it is another thing to have “a root of bitterness by which many are defiled” in your midst where there is disrespect of authority or of the church's positions.

With that there can be no peace.

I was burned once because of that attempt but I would not be burned again. Lesson learned.

Martin Luther's wife, Katie, said to him once that he had become very harsh. He said, “They made me that way, Katie.” The ministry had done that to me. I would never again allow myself to be disrespected.

All these things were happening post-Edinburg and they began happening in rapid succession.

But without doubt the most significant thing that happened to me at this period was my devotion to a Christian discipline – the discipline of prayer. By the end of '85 there were some areas in our church that I was just discouraged about. What I did was to take a notebook I had from a conference I attended, threw out all the material and kept the notebook. Then I filled it with typing paper and wrote “May 15/'85” in the upper left hand corner. Beneath it I wrote all the prayer requests I could think of. I left room to the left of the requests for the answers. I said, “Lord, each day I will write my requests and I will

continue until you say 'yes, no or later.'" I would write the date and that days request and then begin praying backward for those requests that had not been answered. At the end of about 40 minutes I would mark my spot and the next day begin there and pray backward until I had prayed back to the beginning. I have done this now for 30 years.

Like Jacob I wrestled with God, "I will not let you go until you bless me."

Every day from that day on I would find a time each day and go into my closet or anywhere alone and pray. From that time God's blessing began to come down.

Still today I get away and pray for the needs and pains of the church, the folks, myself and my family, and the nation.

I really don't think that young folks pray because they have the illusion of energy – "because I'm young and full of energy I can get it done." Prayer is born out of imminent disaster – the recognition that I am in a realm where physical talent and strength is useless. "Though we walk in the flesh we do not war in the flesh."

"Apart from Me you can do nothing."

Time and experience and failure convince ministers of this truth.

If my house were burning I would save my red prayer book. There, I can follow my life, church, marriage, kids, friends and country since May 15, 1985. Life became prayer.

Shortly after I spoke to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes national staff meeting in Anderson, Indiana. God blessed mightily. From that meeting Nelson Cook of the Dallas FCA office asked me to do a state college "advance" in Crandall, Texas. Only about 15 men were there. I did it again the next year in '85 and 30 were there. Men and women attended in '86 and there were 200. From these advances I grew really tight with about 12 young ballplayers who went on to do great things for God as all of them had an insatiable hunger of God's word. They gave me a rejuvenated zeal as a mid-30s year old minister.

In '84 Teresa and I went to an FCA coaches conference at Lake George, New York. The song leader that year was a red headed tomboy, former athletic trainer and then FCA staff named Jean Oliver (destined to become Jean-O and then Jean Klughart) who runs our Women's discipleship program – one of the most fruitful women's ministries in the country if not the world. Jean and I would team up for seven straight years of the FCA East College Advances that touched hundreds of lives. She has been a joy to me since 1984.

Since I returned from Ireland it seemed like God tore down and then built up as long as I would just "come closer."

But not only did I begin doing FCA conferences at the national level but I began doing Christmas Conferences each year for Campus Crusade: first Dallas, then Atlanta, then Denver, then Philadelphia, then Greensboro, North Carolina. Through the 90s there was

not a Christmas that I was not somewhere in front of 1500 of the nation's best college Christians.

Another unexpected road of fruitfulness opened up. The YMCA director who attended DBC asked me to be on the YMCA board if only to represent the "C", and so I did. On that board I met five men who would go on to become Denton Bible elders or Denton Bible staff – i.e. the infamous Jerry Falbo.

One of them was Spunky Adams who ended up praying to receive Christ in front of my house. Spunky became an elder and his best friend Jimmy Rench became a deacon. Spunky, Jimmy, Jerry Falbo and I began a Bible study at Wyatt's then IHOP and ultimately became our 300 man Bible study on Wednesdays at 7:00 a.m. at Denton Bible, that has reached hundreds and shepherded numbers of brothers grown old through the valley of the shadow and on into the presence of God. The study has gone on now for 30 years.

At almost the exact time an FCA buddy named Jerry Campbell asked if I could meet with six Lewisville businessmen who wanted to grow spiritually and learn the scripture. We began meeting in '87 and that study became a 200 man study finally meeting at Lakeland Baptist in Lewisville and has met for 30 years teaching thousands of men.

At the same time a young fellow in Dallas named Keith Chancy who was one of the directors of Kanakuk Camp in Branson, Missouri asked if I could meet with him and teach him the word. I can't meet with just one man for any length of time but I told him if he could find a handful of men like him I would meet him at 6:00 a.m. on Fridays in Lewisville at the home of Jim and Marie Hoffpauer. We ended up meeting for four years. It was a group I called The Bruise Brothers. They were serious men – strong as goat's breath.

Three of them started Watermark Bible Church in Dallas. One was Todd Wagner who pastors Watermark. Another was Kelly Shackelford who has argued Christian freedom before the Supreme Court and is a director of the Liberty Institute. David Wills handled planned giving for Focus on the Family. James Stecker became a Campus Crusade campus director. Another man, Dickie Norman, became with his wife, Wilda, the most prolific pre-marital counseling couple I have ever seen. Keith Chancey would become my youth director at Denton Bible and would begin one of the most vibrant youth ministries in the country and then go on to train youth ministers up in Branson. Fouad Faris would go on to be the FCA director of New England and then became a pastor.

That study, however, in 1990 evolved into the most fruitful area of ministry I ever entered upon.

It had become difficult to raise growing young sons in a crowded environment so I decided to do something I had never done before or heard of a church doing.

I had become so impressed with The Bruise Brothers and bringing in young men from the outside who would leave and then take their learning elsewhere, that I decided to broaden it into a discipleship program. In the fall of '90 I would end the Friday morning study and

begin to visit with young graduates who wanted a depth of scripture and a ministry. I would challenge them to move to Denton, get a simple job and commit four hours a week to study, service, evangelism and discipleship.

From '90 to present, Denton Bible and I became one and the same with "Young Guns" or sometimes simply called "The Program."

It began in '90 almost simultaneous with another mighty activity of God. One that started in a conversation on a Sunday morning jog before church with a fellow who had a suggestion.

"You ever thought about teaching the Song of Solomon from the pulpit?"

Denton Bible was about to explode.

The Guy in the Tie

Part XVII The Nineties; Missions, Young Guns, and the rediscovery of an ancient book.

From '84 to '90 things accelerated. Pain and failure and disappointment had weaned me off of my own strength. These things taught me the desperation of prayer. I had also learned a painful lesson. Never placate disrespectful people to maintain peace. Better to detonate a problem person outside than to receive them into the camp where they can metastasize. I would never make that mistake again. I have beaten myself up a thousand times for doing so.

But God wonderfully preserved me in His providence. When people left, people arrived in my life simultaneously. Great young men from FCA, zealous young men and women from Kanakuk ministry, businessmen from Lewisville, faithful young converts from the YMCA board, Campus Crusaders nationwide with a passion for discipleship.

A new head coach arrived at North Texas. A former State Champion coach from Marshall named Dennis Parker who asked me to begin a coaches and faculty study. Dennis also asked me to be his team chaplain. Educators Lloyd Campbell, Steve Poe, Phil Young, Bob Reed, Alan Bradley, John Williamson and John Quintanella became lifelong friends.

A real estate man named Allie Miller was diagnosed with prostate cancer and the prognosis shook his world. He became the most passionate attender of the Wednesday morning men's study ever in that he brought over 25 men to the study in the six years before he passed away. He was so zealous in serving our media ministry that we named it The Allie Miller Memorial Media Center. He and his brother, Arky, became my lifelong friends.

As I "drew closer," God lifted me and did "exceeding abundant beyond what we ask or even think."

But even though all of these things happened simultaneously three things arose that literally put Denton Bible on the map.

One was when Mel turned his attention to a pressing need in all of world missions. In countries where thousands were responding to the gospel, where would they go to church? Where would international pastors receive training? Mel looked for a tool or a curriculum that could be placed in a foreign pastor's hands. He discovered in Atlanta the Bible Training Center for Pastors – the B.T.C.P. developed by a fellow named Dennis Mock. He had basically condensed a seminary curriculum into ten notebooks that an international pastor could have a trained person take him through over a few years.

You couldn't send an international to an American seminary because of financial reasons but also because an international pastor and his family simply would not want to return to the want of their country after experiencing the freedom, safety, health care, financial possibilities, education, etc. etc. of the U.S. Bringing them here was counterproductive. So Mel and his protégé James Arnold along with members of our staff and then our elders and laymen began to head off to everywhere – from Russia to Ecuador to the Solomon Islands

to China to Manila to Brazil and Africa in training men in the B.T.C.P. By the early 90s I had taken over all the pulpit duties as Mel developed the growing Denton Bible Missions Department. Soon to follow was the women's Titus 2 International that Denton Bible women began to take to foreign countries to teach women the art of being a woman, wife and mother.

We had been known for Bible exposition and discipleship but now Denton Bible began to be known internationally as a church with missionary passion. In time we would develop a missionary staff and soon our own missionary sending agency and Missionary Training Institute.

At the same time, my sons had become teenagers. Ben was 14 in 1990 and John was 11. A house with four other men was a tad confining so I looked to an alternative to live-in discipleship that I had been doing. My memory called up one of my heroes of church history named William Tennent. In the 1700s he took a number of young men and trained them in the Bible and Calvinistic theology up in New Jersey. His school was derisively called The Log College. But the men that he taught became many of the shapers of early America. The Log College became Princeton Seminary.

I said "that's what I want to do."

John Hannah, my church history professor at DTS, once said that all evangelists as they grow older turn to education. I was not an evangelist but I had the same turning because I had the same insight – long term quality theological education to faithful hearts will ultimately make a bigger impact than mass evangelism. I had also seen the impact of my Friday morning 6:00 a.m. guys from all points round about Bible study. So I dismissed the Friday morning study. It was about to evolve into "The Program" – Men who were college graduates and disciplined and committed to Christ and who would move to Denton. They would get hand-to-mouth jobs that would allow them to make ends meet and they would study with me Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at 6:00 a.m. (except on Tuesdays that met at 5:30 a.m.). On one night of the week they would attend Evangelism Explosion learning how to train others in how to share their faith. Each would also choose a ministry in the church to serve in and learn ministry from the ground up. They would attend Denton Bible and be faithful. There was a standard to The Program. If you were one second late it was a five dollar fine. Missing unexcused was a ten dollar fine. Miss consistently and you would be asked to leave. That only has happened to five men since 1990. I would teach 13 men (the first and smallest group) to 65 (the largest). All I had to do was mention the group at Crusade, FCA or any other conference, delineate the requirements, and wait for men to take the challenge. I would teach them Genesis through Nehemiah and they would learn the "storyline" or "metanarrative" of the Bible. One other requirement was given. Those who went through The Program were expected to never have a time that they were not making disciples. If you weren't, I said, "I will make you an illustration." And the same thing went for me. Later on, the group came to be called "Young Guns."

Since 1990 when we began, 22 groups of men have been through the program sending out over 500 men. Most of my staff are Young Guns. Others are in parachurch ministries, missionaries, educators, coaches, teachers, band directors, pastors, youth directors, camp directors, businessmen, doctors, lawyers and college professors. Young Guns have poured into key positions.

At present 22 framed group photos hang on my wall. They face me when I walk in my study. These are the men who got my life and my best. They are my legacy.

Two have died in the field serving God and His church.
Two have committed suicide.
Some have failed famously.
Most are faithful.

Another simultaneous explosion occurred in 1991. It was the seeming rediscovery of an Old Testament book that had lay under the rubble of allegory and an overly prudent fear of what it might mean.

When I was at DTS a professor named Tom Constable approached The Song of Solomon as literal. I was intrigued even though the book was only touched in a cursory way. Later on I read a book on a literal interpretation of The Song of Solomon by a former Dallas professor (who is Jewish) named Craig Glickman. It was called "Song for Lovers." I was blown away at the cultural relevancy of this ancient, usually overlooked book. I then began to teach it with my own personal approach to small groups of men *and* of women. It was always kind of a hit but only within the confines of DBC.

Then one day in 1991, in the fall of the year, I was out jogging with a fellow named Jimmy Rench, now one of our deacons, who was my early on Sunday morning jogging buddy. I can remember the exact place where we were on Mingo Road where Jimmy said to me, "Why don't you teach from the pulpit The Song of Solomon?" My first thought was, "Are you insane?!" I was imagining the uproar from all the upright and proper and mostly over 50. But after a moment I thought, "Hmmm."

I decided to do it but first I wanted to try it out on a church crowd. I had made some very close friends in the late 80s who were out in the Panhandle in a little farming town named Gruver – Richie and Carolyn Fletcher. They and so many in the town came along at the same time as others in the 80s who served to pick me up at the time I simply needed someone to pick me up. They are all precious friends to Teresa and me to this day.

Teresa and I drove the five hours to Gruver on a Friday and I taught The Song of Solomon – uncensored – on Friday night and Saturday morning. The reaction from those "salt of the earth" Baptist conservatives was overwhelming. They loved it. I was amazed. And so I said, "Heck, let's try it out. If Gruver can handle it, anybody can handle it."

So we did. That very Sunday I began. By this time we had gone to two morning services and an evening service of college and singles. Altogether about 700 attended all three

services. By the 6th Sunday and the completion of the six-part series we had 1200. We had almost doubled in little over a month. I had to make an announcement in all three services for unattached men to get up from their seats and come to the front and sit on pillows (we had about 300 dollars worth of pillows from MacFrugals) so that I literally had men sitting at my feet and the church was wall to wall folks. We had a verbal agreement among the leadership that no one would invite Bob Hagerman, the Denton fire chief, to church lest he shut us down over the fire code. Our building was built for 300. We tore out a wall and made it for 400. And yet our evening service, on the 6th week, had 711 folks attend. We shoehorned them in everywhere. We had a kitchen in the back and the students would fill the kitchen. I remember seeing them all stacked in and I saw one of them, Brady Robinson, sitting on the edge of the sink and sinking! His rear was in the sink and his head was leaning out peering around the opening of the kitchen trying to see me – the most uncomfortable position since Eutychus in the window at midnight listening to Paul. When I saw that, I thought, “I have stumbled onto something.” I would not have sat in such a contortion to watch Babe Ruth’s called shot and yet there Brady sat to hear a portion of the Bible. I had found the mother lode.

After that series, I taught James then Revelation and our church never “recovered.” The onlookers stayed. Soon we added a college minister, then an administrator, then a small group’s director, then an assistant to Mel in missions, then a women’s director and a Junior High director. Then, in the early 90s, we saw the need for a new and larger building to seat 2000.

Then we discovered that people wanted that series on cassette tapes so we named the series “Love Song” and began to mail it out. It became in such demand that we had a designated church member named Allie Miller do nothing but reproduce and mail out “Love Song” to whoever called in. From that came the Media Ministry. From then on whenever I would speak for Campus Crusade they would have one stipulation – I had to teach one time on The Song of Solomon. Soon it was part of my introduction – “. . . and now the man who did The Song of Solomon series, Tommy Nelson.” I had unknowingly uncovered a need! In a post-modern culture that had moved away from a Creator and final truth, there was a collapse from the loss of meaning concerning man, woman, sex, marriage, dating, courtship, morality and fidelity. Our culture was hurting and at the end of its tether. Many may act as if there are no absolutes but once he or she gets into a relationship and gets hurt and hurt *badly* (such are relationships) they want final *rules*. All lovers become Calvinists as soon as there is pain.

When I lay dying, I’m sure, like all dying men, my mind will start replaying my life. One of the things that I will remember most fondly is that I was able, through God’s good providence to recover an ancient book that had lay concealed. Like Josiah I had “found a book” and many of our culture “heard its contents and tore their robes.” I had re-discovered the theological Tut’s tomb. The exposition of The Song of Solomon became a book, The Book of Romance. It became a lecture series I did over 90 times in 90 cities. It became three video series. It was played over Christian radio countless times with countless phone interviews. But the most joyful thing to me was that it freed bunches of pastors everywhere to preach the book both literally as well as symbolically. It was a book

whose time had come. The culture demanded answers and Solomon in his wisdom gave it. I was requested by the wives of congressmen to teach the book in the nation's capital. I taught it on Valentine's Day at a Pentagon banquet. I taught it at a Dallas Cowboy's Bible study at Herschel Walker's house.

I didn't doctor the book. I didn't dress it up. I simply explained it. Better, I was the midwife who just brought the book to the light. It spoke for itself. I turned the key and its engine roared.

It was steroids to Denton Bible. We built a new sanctuary, now The Mill, to accommodate the growth. It was The House That Solomon Built. By the year of '93 we were 2000 people in a new building.

From 700 to 2000 in two years. The calls for Young Guns came with such rapidity that I had to cut the program off and cap it at a certain number. One year I just let the numbers go and I had 65 Young Guns.

But one of the greatest impacts of The Song of Solomon came from a phone call in 1993 from the single's pastor at Prestonwood Baptist in Dallas. He had begun a singles Bible study on Monday nights following one that had begun in Atlanta a few years before. It was called Metro because it was for singles all over the Metroplex. The teacher that flew into Dallas each Monday for the study had some problems that caused him to have to step down. The study had grown to 200 people and needed a fill in. That's when my phone rang one evening.

"Tommy Nelson? This is Doug Hudson." It would begin a working friendship with the most innovative thinker I had ever met.

The Guy in the Tie
Part XVIII The Millennium: Metro, Doug, and The Song of Solomon

Doug Hudson as the singles director of Prestonwood Baptist in Dallas took over the singles of the rising Baptist Church of Dallas which took over the reins from First Baptist as the flagship of Dallas Baptists. It was also Dallas's most sensational church coming off the Jerry Springer-like script of pastor Billy Weber and his entourage of illicit women and then his swift and untimely death from brain cancer. Dallas had become the blue and silver city of aspiring wealth and "Dallas Blondes." It was situated in North Dallas then moved to the more vibrant north near Plano.

Status, singles, sensation, sex, and swagger. All these things formed the perfect climate for Metro Dallas. Singles from all churches or no church at all gathering to meet and mingle in a Christian climate. To be blessed by really quality worship music, a strong unapologetic fundamental stance and straight Bible teaching from a Dallas Seminary grad, me, who was from outside Dallas so he had no personal ecclesiastic ambitions. Metro's time had come.

Doug Hudson called me in the spring of '93 because his previous speaker had to step down. I agreed to do four weeks at Metro and the crowd began to grow. By the winter of '94 there were 800 folks at metro. The buzz had begun. In the winter Doug asked me to do "that thing you did at Denton Bible on the Song of Solomon." I did it. We went from 800 to 1200 in six weeks. Metro then moved north when Prestonwood built north and I wondered if I should spend my "day off" doing one of the country's largest singles gathering. I asked Teresa and she said, "It looks like God's hand is on Metro", so I made an open-ended commitment to the study.

Sometimes I forget what a uniqueness that a Dallas Seminary education is. How unique Bible exposition is. And a system of theology separating Israel and the church, looking to Israel's regathering and Christ's return and rule over all mankind. After a year of this at Metro we had grown to 2000 singles, couples, and a big gaggle of Dallas high school kids. We looked up and in the Dallas Morning News there Metro was on the front of the religion section. We were a novelty. But the talk by everyone was the Song of Solomon. Metro couldn't keep the tapes in stock. So with the move to Plano, Doug said to me, "Let's do it again." We promoted it for a couple of months and then in '95 we did it again, but this time we brought in a filming team of four cameras from all angles working with a filming director guiding them on headsets from a central monitor. They taped me on each section with mountains of film of myself and even more of crowd response – "whites of your eyes" crowd shots. Girls with tears glistening, guys with big yappers open in guffaws. The opening night? Four thousand showed. And the crowd grew each Monday. I had never talked to a crowd of 4000 in a closed setting. I had spoken to a Promises Keepers football stadium of 10,000 but the sound and effect is lost in the open air and there is little sense of unity. But 4000 in a church is electric. As a matter of fact I had never even seen 4000 people in a church. Doug said, "Help me welcome Tommy Nelson." They cheered. Electric. I dropped a funny. They busted out in laughter. I had never heard 4000 bust out at something funny. Beyond electric. It was chilling. I needed it, too, because as experienced as I was in speaking (I was 45 at the time, now half my life spent preaching), I had never

been in front of 4000 sets of eyes set on MOI. I was, for the only time in my ministry, truly experiencing stage fright. Stage fright is where you can't think of your material because of self-consciousness which causes more fear which causes . . . You get the picture? It's the self-generating tornado. But I dropped a funny. The house exploded. They were mine. Indeed, "I will be with you."

For six weeks from 7:00 – 8:30 it was magic. The filming was the height of excellence. The ebb and flow of emotion was on every face. Every bit of humor was caught. Once it was done, we broke the six hours into twelve thirty minute sessions, later on filming an intro and outro to each section. We also made a study guide to work through each section, tailor made for Sunday schools and group Bible studies.

Interesting story. We had a guy with a hand held camera buzzing through the crowd like a bee, landing on choice expressive faces. One of the faces he loved, that the camera loved, was a blonde, stunning OU grad named Carrie Hullender. She soon after became Mrs. Carrie Hudson –wife of Doug. No fool, my boy Doug.

We were on the front of the Dallas Morning News again. This time because Sex And The Bible was the hottest topic in Dallas. It seemed like every Christian publication wanted an article. Every Christian radio station and news network wanted an interview.

One day Charles Stolfus on my staff came into my study laughing and put a gossip newspaper in front of me – the kind you buy off the rack right next to National Enquirer when you check out at Kroger. When Charles slapped it down in front of me all I could see was, "Pastor talks about sex from the Bible." My heart almost shut down. But it turned out to be one of the best articles written on Metro and the Song of Solomon.

The video went out and exploded. Campus Crusade had the presence of mind to put it in the hands of the military because of the stress that military marriages were under. We received countless letters from military men from all over the world who saw the video and had their marriages transformed. One fellow said they showed it on the runway in Iraq. Another fellow, a sailor, said they ran it 24-7 on a submarine. There was nothing like it. The power of the presentation was that it wasn't a teaching on marriage but a verse by verse treatment of what the Song of Solomon says about marriage. That was the power. And live to 4000 singles. Sunday schools picked up on it. Churches showed it in services. The para-church picked up on it. Christian schools showed it in chapel. Later on we produced Song of Solomon for Youth produced live with 300 high schoolers at First Baptist Dallas.

I soon was approached by Thomas Nelson Publishing about a book. We transcribed the tapes, tightened the language and before long had The Book of Romance, a study on the Song of Solomon. I *still* get a check from Thomas Nelson. It sold tremendously.

What happened next was inevitable.

Churches began calling wondering if *they* could host a conference on the Song of Solomon. It became so called for that Doug Hudson quit his job at Prestonwood to do nothing but line up and direct city-wide conferences. He organized an entire business, Hudson Productions, to do nothing but produce tapes of the series, take calls for tapes, and send them out. Doug and I decided to do 20 conferences the first year for exposure and then five in the fall and five in the spring in the year after then see the response. We saw between a thousand and two thousand a conference – some smaller, some larger. But the effect was incredible for people that previously could not *find* the book in their Bibles.

All in all we did about 90 conferences over the next eight years and got the Word of God into the hands of thousands upon untold thousands of people. Still today I hear the presentation at times pop up on radio.

But the most wonderful event that arose from the presentation was that it helped to answer a prayer I had offered since 1973 – a prayer for my brother Bob.

There were five years between Bob and I. I looked up to him and his pals and he took care of me but as the years wore on Bobby wandered from what he knew was right. His son and daughter went through divorces. Bob was seeing his faults and lack of leadership show up in his children's lives and it hit him hard. Plus he had done really well financially but he was still the same person. Plus, he had been by his own admission a rotten husband in many respects.

My mother had my Song of Solomon tapes, how I don't know. And she handed them to Bobby and said, "You need to watch these." You ever had your mother hand you tapes on sex that your little brother had made and order you to watch? That may be the most humiliating thing a man can do.

Bob and his wife, Nellie, sat down to watch them to get momma off his back. He got bushwhacked by the Holy Spirit.

He and Nellie would watch a tape, cry, apologize and then go to the next one. They laughed and cried their way through six hours of The Song of Solomon and came out new. And then I looked out on the congregation one Sunday and there sat Bobby and his wife, Nellie. I stopped right in the middle of my message and said, "Momma, Bobby is in church" – because we sent tapes to my mother in Waco, I had to let her know. A couple of Sundays later it was communion Sunday and there was Bobby serving communion! I didn't know whether to praise God or run for cover! And then Bobby called me to see if Teresa and I could come to their home in Plano along with brothers Bill and Jim and Momma and eat a brisket. And it was wonderfully peaceful and blessed! Christ had indeed come into my brother's life. Bobby drove up from Plano every Sunday for church and then began driving up for the joy of his soul – the Wednesday morning men's 7:00 a.m. Bible study. Then Bob and Nellie moved to Denton to be nearer the church. Then Bob began driving down to Dallas with me and my friend Lloyd Campbell to go to Metro. Bob developed a ravenous appetite for the Word of God and I watched that superb business mind and salesman gift-of-gab personality become used of God. Then Bob said, "I'm learning Bible but I need

someone to share it with. And I mean some people who *really* need it.” I said, “Ever heard of our jail ministry?” Before long he had a new career. As soon as the “amen” on Sunday morning Bob would make a bee-line to the Denton jail to go to his assigned pod and teach any who came. It was his greatest joy. Over the next 20 years Bob became my best friend and greatest encourager. We began driving to Throckmorton or Dublin every fall to dove hunt and on the way out and back he would put on a Gaither Homecoming CD and we would listen to six hours of gospel music. His son and daughter became committed Christians and they married Christians and their children became Christians who adored their “da-daddy.” Nellie, Bob’s wife, recommitted her life to Christ, became a faithful teacher in our Sunday school, and a faithful choir member. Bob led his best friend, Louis Carimbas, to Christ who carried the gospel, CDs and Bibles to Saudi Arabia where he traveled for an oil company. Louis passed away from cancer shortly after he was accepted to Dallas Seminary. Bob and I met every day at Good Samaritan Senior Living Center to be with our mother and take her to dinner and were with her until her last hour. Then Bobby developed myelofibrosis, a disease of the bone marrow, which took his life in 2014 shortly after momma passed away.

I had tears when Bobby passed, but tears of joy with no regrets because Bobby finished well. God gave me back my brother. And all of that began with the Song of Solomon.

After Metro I wrote another book, and Doug and I made another video series on the book of Ecclesiastes. It was a book that had a great impact on Denton Bible as well as a huge response from those who received tapes. It was called A Life Well Lived. Again we retrieved a little taught book.

By this time we were into the new millennia of 2000. I had retired from Metro as the demands of pastoring, writing, Song of Solomon conferences, Young Guns, and three large men’s Bible studies had begun to take its toll on a man now into his 50s. By this time, our staff had grown to about 50 and our budget was seven million a year.

We heard the projections of Denton County’s future growth and we decided to build our third and final sanctuary to seat 3000 and give us room enough until Christ returned.

Though I was glad we would be able to grow (because we were maxed out in our second building) I was even more glad because of two reasons. One reason was that the old building was a homiletical nightmare. It was long, narrow and flat. Those up close looked up; those far back had no eye contact. Plus the sound quality was difficult. I felt like I had to scream for four (yes, four) services. But there was another reason. For some reason people had no sense of being in a church. They felt like they were in a shopping mall or a gym. People would drift in twenty minutes late in t-shirts and sandals without Bibles and slouch un-singing, un-worshipping, non-participatory. Architecture contributes greatly to an ethos or feeling. It could have been also that the day we are in breeds this sort of ecclesiological slop. Americans tend to show up in church in a pragmatic, utilitarian sense that says, “entertain me, amuse me, help me.” But the higher idea that we are the people of God who gather as a people for worship of the God with whom we are in fellowship is lost to us.

I'll tell you something about "me" that you might suspect. I hate anything culturally modern. I do appreciate cell phones when I travel but beyond that I miss deeply the ethos of the '50s. Yes, I realize there were real injustices and wrongs of the pre-60s – things that needed to be changed in race and gender equality and things that were. But there was a sense of dignity and propriety that also changed, and changed for the worse. Somehow the '50s were gone with the wind. I think that's why I love watching Turner Movie Classics because it's such a pleasant memory that is stirred. And one of those things was "Sunday." Sunday wasn't "relevant." It didn't mean to be. It was unique. Different. Separate. Holy. Dignified. Higher. Better.

John, my son, said in one service in the old building he heard "plink plink plink" from the seat in front of him. It was a fellow cutting his fingernails. John said, "I was ready for him to pull off his shoes and start to work on them big yellers!"

So when we drew up the new sanctuary, our final one, a 20 million dollar project, our present building, I said to the architect, "I want a church – a classic American Rockwellian church. I don't want an office building which modern churches have become. I want people to drive by and say, "that's a church!" I want it a place where you lower your voice instinctively when you walk in. I want it a place where you would feel like dropping by in the day just to pray. A place where you feel like taking off your hat when you enter. I want it to have a cross as a background and a cross on top which you can see from a distance. And I want an organ that can reach everyone inside and fill the place with sound. I also want room for a choir that will fill the place and an orchestra to back up the choir."

People in the new building said that there seemed to be a real change from the old one. There was. And it was by design. It was designed to be a service that brought about a more reverent attitude – a not so casual attitude. There is a new generation of Christian leadership emerging that is producing a stage presentation of a young man with a four day growth, a pullover and blue jeans, with a headset, moving about the stage like an entertainer showing us how to be successful.

I'm not sure who to blame but it's not good.

By 2005 we made one of the smartest hires in our history – Kendall Lucas, who now directs our worship, fit into the new building like a glove. I personally have never enjoyed Sundays ever in my life like I've enjoyed in the last ten years.

By 2006 my schedule was:

- Preach three times Sunday
- Monday – 6:00 a.m. Young Guns
- Tuesday
5:30 a.m. Young Guns
7:00 a.m. Lewisville Men's Bible Study

- 6:00 p.m. twice a month – elder’s meeting
- Wednesday
 - 6:00 a.m. Young Guns
 - 7:00 a.m. Men’s Bible Study at DBC
- Thursday – 11:00 a.m. Staff meeting
- Friday
 - 6:00 a.m. Young Guns
 - 7:00 a.m. UNT faculty study
- Then five times in the fall; five in the spring run to the airport and catch a flight
 - Teach three hours Friday night
 - Teach three hours Saturday morning
 - Run to the airport . . . get home that evening
- Sunday 9:00 a.m. – Do it again ----- it comes to 17 teaching times a week

Mix in with this writing books, counseling, conference speaking – I had four jobs. I loved every minute on The Edge.

At this same time I had two staff members I was very close with that I had to dismiss. One for moral reasons; the other for mishandling the church’s money. The stress and pain were intense.

I had heard of burnout. I had heard of depression. But those were things that happened to others – not me. All of my life had been lived with challenges, dreams, obstacles, determination and achieving amidst pressure. I certainly was fit. I could always bench 300 and always run from Sanger to my front door (10 miles). I had determined to do that and I did. My life was making my body do what it must to achieve what I decided. I had been schooled in discipline since I was eight.

I was in the midst of seeing the church of my dreams go up right before my eyes. Young Guns, Metro, Song of Solomon conferences, 500 men in Bible study, 4000 congregants learning the scriptures amidst the finest of a church staff raised up from our own training. Missions and pastoral training reaching to the four corners, a business – Hudson Productions with six employees – putting Bible in people’s hands the world over, God and The Military, a video produced by Doug and I to bless men and women in the military world-wide. Men from Young Guns were now beginning to pastor and begin their own discipleship programs. And what to me was my greatest honor – to be able to serve on the Dallas Seminary Board and help direct the seminary that had shaped my life. My oldest son was in Homeland Security, my youngest was in the midst of a Triple A season with the St. Louis Cardinals that by September would have him at the top. In October he would have a World Series ring. They had given us five beautiful grandkids. My brother Bob was in ministry next to me teaching in the jail ministry. My wife, Teresa, was discipling young MOMS and International Wives. I had published five books.

What could the future hold? I was just 55.

It was May of 2006.

In June I would ask God to die.

The Guy in the Tie
Part XIX The Dark Night of the Soul

In the year of 2004 I began to experience something altogether new to me. Allergies or at least I thought they were allergies. It would happen in the spring and fall. My body would feel achy and feverish. I began to hunt around for something to offset allergies even at times going for a steroid shot. Never in my life had I had anything resembling allergies. Why in spring and fall? Things blooming, things dying. So we figured? I also began to have problems going to sleep. Why? Allergies? I couldn't afford not sleeping because I had too many early morning things to do so I would take various sleep aids. During this time Gene Wilborn, an elder, and my wife began to raise a concern. "Are you doing too much?" I said no because I truly loved everything I was doing. I thought, "No bad can come from doing good, no matter how much. You can't burn out doing what you love." I was wrong.

In June 2006 we, as elders, decided to do something we hadn't done in 16 years – to teach the Song of Solomon to the church where it started – Denton Bible. Five weeks into the study, before I taught chapter seven to the evening service – the chapter that is my favorite chapter, "The Art of Romance," something happened that hitherto I had never experienced. While sitting in a chair in the church office – and the only way I can say it is this – I felt my body give way underneath me. It was like a beast under a load that collapsed. Something in me broke. My heart began to race, my blood pressure spiked, my mouth got very dry, I began to sweat and I had no strength. I laid down and it passed. My thought and the consensus was that I had jogged and worked in the garden that Sunday and gotten dehydrated.

But over the next week "the thing" began to come back but in a more sinister way. No so much physical but of the soul and mind. "Soul and mind" is really the best way to relate it because I'm not sure what it was, even now. It was like a flu of the spirit – pain in one's soul. What was becoming obvious, though, was that I was not able to sleep. I had to be knocked out with Ambien, a prescription sleep medication, and I would wake up with a jolt. I know now in retrospect it was the onset of clinical anxiety and clinical depression. I was stuck in 5th gear and my body wouldn't stop. I was spent. I was exhausted in my soul.

My doctor put me in Presbyterian hospital for a night. No one had any idea what was wrong which made it worse. But my body ached and I was exhausted. In the hospital I was able to get nine hours of sleep and something was given to me to make my body quit hurting. The flood subsided for the moment.

In the front of my mind, however, a clock was running – a clock of my making. Doug Hudson and I were going to host a conference at Denton Bible for people in the church, in the area, and to people wherever to learn the book of Romans. It was called "Romans, Texas Style." It, like our Song of Solomon video, would have four cameras. We would film, with crowd shots, the most important book of the most important book of all time. With breakfast burritos, the best of coffee, and Dublin Dr. Pepper! Gallons of it. Never had I been able to put Romans on video. I felt that once I did it I could die! Here would be an exegesis

of the book that changed the world. We were getting ready for a major work and here I was with a phantom malady that was putting me in a hospital.

I simply did not have time to be laid up. Plus I had another book coming out on marriage. The pressure mounted. I took my Ambien and pressed on.

The next day Teresa and I took our two grandkids to Gainesville to the zoo. We came home and were watching TV when another “something” gave way on me. This time it wasn’t physical as the first time in the church office. It was a collapse of something within and the sensation was immediately recognizable . . . depression. The thought clearly went through my mind – “So this is depression.” It was something dark and dead within me. If I had received a call that my mother had died it would not have phased me. If I had found out that I’d inherited a million dollars it would not have phased me. Something deep within me was wrong, bad wrong.

I began to have continual pain like a toothache all over my body. I woke up one night, bolt upright, jarred out of my sleep because my body was on fire! The best we can guess is that it was pure adrenaline. The thoughts began to flood my mind – “Why is this happening? With so much on the line. Why is God letting this happen?” I thought, “If this is a new norm, I can’t live like this!” And a thought I had never voiced, “God take me home.” Never did I think I could think as such.

My buddy, Doug Hudson, called and said he had pulled some strings and gotten me into the Cooper Clinic for a full physical. By this time I was to the point that I could not sit in a chair for over 20 seconds. I had to keep moving. I was exhausted and unable to sleep. No longer was there a sense of depression but it had mutated into anxiety. I waited in the lobby, walking and pacing. I watched the folks at Cooper working out, doing something I had done every day of my life since I was 13. Something I could no longer do. If I could jog and lift weights again I would give every dime I had, but my body was spent.

For four hours I got my physical. When I finished the woman who did it sat down with Teresa and I and Doug. She said I was in perfect health. But this was not what I wanted to hear. I wanted them to find some organ, some gland, some something doing something it shouldn’t.

And then she said, “I think you are obviously dealing with anxiety and perhaps should consider Xanax.” To this I immediately said, “I’m not a sophomore girl!” I incidentally have since tried to find that woman to apologize. She did say that one particular test showed I might have an imbalance that an endocrinologist could resolve. I grasped at that. I was only days away from “Romans, Texas Style” with 800 people showing up for twelve hours of teaching – a 70,000 dollar production. A ball that I had to carry.

I immediately was admitted to Denton Regional for a deeper examination – MRI’s and bloodwork. They found my hormone balance to be perfect. The MRI only determined a possible infection in a sinus.

I went home. That Monday morning I had a full on “anxiety attack.” That’s when your body goes into a “fight or flight” mode. When fear manifests itself where no fearful circumstance exists – when you want to flee for no immediate reason and with no place to run and the blood drains from your torso to your legs and you go into panic. It rises and recedes like a biological-emotional geyser but when you don’t know what it is you swear that you have lost your mind.

My body ached. For the first time in my life I could not read. I could not mentally focus so as to pray. I could not enter an extended conversation. I could not watch television. I could only pace. I told my wife, “I am Marley’s ghost!”

I met with our elders on a Thursday and said I had no idea what was happening to me but that I could not carry the load as pastor for the time being. I honestly did not know if I would pull out of what I had. I remember asking them if they would take care of Teresa if I had to quit. They assured me that no matter what the future held that I need not worry about the church’s care. That is how low I was.

And then I did something that I never would have believed that I could do. I told Doug Hudson that I could not do the Romans conference. It was Thursday and the conference began the next day. I had preached once before with the flu and lay down between services. Never in my entire ministerial career had I cancelled a speaking engagement because of anything. Now I would cancel only 24 hours out. My life, as I knew it, was over. With no understanding of what was wrong and no hope outside of God’s sovereignty.

This would be the most difficult test of my life. I had been bushwhacked, hijacked, commandeered by what no one understood. I was flying by the panel, socked in, in full vertigo. I was too weak and confused to lift the shield of faith. All I could do was to lay under it.

I dropped 20 pounds in just weeks because my body was in a continual 5th gear. If I lay on a couch and put my legs on Teresa she could feel the crackling in my legs of muscle fibers firing continually like an electrical current. At night I would lay still as different muscles spasmed. My wife said I was “thrashing,” because I was looking desperately for some pill, some treatment, some anything to remove the movement between deep depression and intense anxiety that was clinical and unrelenting and most of all debilitating. An Ambien at night would knock me out. But at around four A.M. something – “it” – would crawl onto me. If I lay on my left side I would hear what sounded like a whirling helicopter blade overhead and my body would go into immediate anxiety. Zero to sixty. Sixteen hours of purgatory would begin. For all of my life my mornings were my most wonderful times. Now they were my greatest fear and pain. I had lost my mornings, my best friend. Teresa called me “Barbaro” – the thoroughbred whose leg broke in the home stretch but he kept trying to run. I was Barbaro. It was that summer of ’06 that Israel and Syria began shelling each other. People were scared but I wasn’t able to be around to comfort anyone. When one goes through a clinical depression or anxiety they can become agoraphobic and do not want to be around people at all. The world is made of salt and you are an open wound. All you do is hurt. And when you have no idea what it is, it becomes the perfect storm creating

its own energy. I called off Young Guns for the coming year. I gave the pulpit to John Brown indefinitely. I cancelled all conference speaking indefinitely. I hurt inside from what I had no idea nor precedent. Only rumors of something that hither to was meant for others.

A friend of mine was on the board of Baylor Hospital. He got me in to their top internist. He checked me out and told me what the female doctor at Cooper Clinic told me. "You have classical clinical anxiety and depression. Other than that you are in perfect health." It was interesting but during this time I used to have a recurrent waking hope of hearing from the hospital that would call me because they found something in my bloodwork that showed a benign tumor somewhere that produced an excess of something that caused my sudden estate. Why before Romans? Why after moving into a 20 million dollar building? Why when the country was crying for a book that had been uncovered? Why? I would walk next door to our "barn," our Morton building. I would lie on the floor. I would pray. I could not voice words.

It was June. I was in the dark.

In the belly of the great beast.

"The dark night of the soul"

It would be three months of agony before the light would break.

The Guy in the Tie
Part XX "I'm Me"

It was June. My life was on hold. For what I did not know. I would wait in faith. Each hour and each day is the same whenever depression sets in. There is no morning, noon and P.M. All feels the same with no sense of time. Monday feels the same as Friday night. Saturday is not a free time. Sunday doesn't "feel" like Sunday. There is no future, no tomorrow or the evening to look forward to. Only a "safe person" or two is allowed into your life that you feel comfortable with. Life is tunnel vision. Nothing surrounding life gets in. Only what is before you. Emotion is dead. Love and romance and desire dead. Ambition dead. Joy is taken by faith but not felt. For some reason you are dead to the "feeling" one associates with salvation. It's as if God has withdrawn.

Funny but there were only three occasions I would have a respite - when I would stand under a shower, when I would walk on a treadmill, and in the evening hours. The first two were probably because of the relaxing effect of dealing with adrenaline. Sometimes the treadmill would be so restive that I would stay on it for 90 minutes. It was the time I could pray the easiest. The evening, I think, was because of the circadian rhythm of night. One's body simply begins turning off. This is because the main reason, I believe, is that the onset of depression/anxiety occurs is by continued, unrelenting, persistent stress and pressure. In the same way, the morning hours can kick things into a very painful high gear. I literally could feel my body slip into high gear. As I lay on my left side I could feel the "pop pop pop pop" of something, maybe blood pressure kicking in. This was because for years upon years I hit the ground on a dead run to fulfill responsibilities.

As I've visited with other people who have been through this, two other things always emerge. An inability to enjoy music. Beauty is dead. Enjoyment is dead. And also an irritation at loud noise. I could not even handle phones ringing. Dogs barking. White noise. One time I climbed up into the gutter over my front door to remove a nest of sparrows that would start up every morning at 6 a.m. Teresa and I were digging out sparrows for noise control.

Thank you depression/anxiety.
Two sides of the same coin. They play tag team.

This was June through early August of 2006.

One time I went up to the upstairs of our barn and just preached to myself. Just to try to feel the delight coursing through me that I had felt for so long. I preached Ephesians 1:3-5 on divine election all to myself. It felt good but I was exhausted after ten minutes.

At night time Teresa and I would sit in front of her computer where we would watch my son John play minor league ball for the St. Louis Cardinal's Triple A club in Memphis. John happened to have his best year. A year where in September he went up to the major league club to play for them in the playoff run. He played great and it gave me a shot of happiness in a painful world.

But on the by and large I stayed close by and hurt. My strength was my wife. I said to her, "I'm sorry, Teresa. You never signed on for this." She said, "I said, 'for better or for worse.' This is just one of the worsers." She was my anchor.

For three months I waited on God.

There is a natural Job-like tendency one has when going through something that severe. You begin naturally, instinctively to ask "Why?" And Job's friends rise up in your ears to accuse you. Every sinful thing you have ever done begins to roll through your memory in self-condemnation. Then one begins to stack up all their good deeds to justify why all this shouldn't be happening at ALL. The debate goes on in the soul whether to be bitter or condemned. Whether this ought or ought not be happening. Then you become exhausted and just learn to rest.

It was another time like Ireland. Just me and the Lord. God drew close. First I began to get letters. Scores of them. Every day I would go to the mailbox and pick them up. And many of them were from congregants who had been through it themselves. I found that three of my staff whom I greatly respect had been through much of the same.

Then I began to get phone calls from men from my past that had been through it. I asked them all one question. "Tell me that I'm going to make it through this." I had to know there was light at the end of the tunnel. Three men told me, "I was in the fetal position." That gave me great encouragement. It's odd but people who have run the gauntlet of depression form an elite and exclusive fraternity. One of them told me, "You might want to keep your struggle to yourself around people who have never experienced it. They all become simplistic counsel about what they have no idea." What he meant is that they will moralize it in cause and effect.

And then sometimes it would just lift and a lightness of spirit and hope would return. Usually in the evening. Usually when Teresa and I would be listening to John play ball in Memphis.

But usually the phone would ring and Teresa would say, "It's just been a bad day." The lowest I got was when I overheard her talking to her brother and I heard her voice break. She began to cry. So I would just try to will myself through an old discipline - "Suck it up and go." But there was nothing there.

Then God truly began to reach into my life in very tangible ways. Humor me but there were three occasions. One was with sparrows. I was puttering in my garden - which made me feel better - and I was humming the famous Ethel Waters song "His Eye is on the Sparrow and I Know He Watches me." As I sang those very words, behold in front of me was a dead sparrow in the garden! The next day I went to get a massage - which someone said would help - and there in the street as I crossed was a dead sparrow. Teresa and I drove to Dallas to meet once with a Christian counselor who had been through my affliction and as I walked up to this office in front of his door was a dead sparrow.

Jesus said, "God knows every sparrow that falls. How much more valuable are you." It was as if God was saying, "I love you and know what you're feeling and where you are." "It is I. Be not afraid."

Also, one day I looked out on my screened in back porch and there was a hummingbird trapped inside who could not find the door out. He was bouncing from screen to screen trying to escape. I came to get him but he ran from me. I waited until he was exhausted then I took him in my hands. I had never, until that moment, held or even seen a hummingbird up close. They're tiny. They are like large mosquitoes. I, as well, was in a place I had never been. I also was scared. I also was trying in every way to get out but could not. I also was exhausted. God again seemed to say, "I love you and know what you're feeling and where you are." "It is I. Be not afraid."

Days later I was puttering around with a wheelbarrow. There right under the handle attached to the wheelbarrow was a cicada. Normally all you ever see of a cicada is the husk – the shell that they leave behind as they emerge anew. They're brilliant. Every color in the spectrum. All I could think (and after three dead sparrows and a hand-held hummingbird you start thinking) was that trial makes you emerge anew.

Once again . . . "It is I. Be not afraid. Take courage."
"Draw closer."

My prayer book during this time had one notation for the three months.

June – August 2016
– in hell

It was interesting but as I said, I could rest my legs on Teresa and she could feel the electricity crackling through them. I would have her rub my legs and she would until she was give out. But the one person that would come and visit and make the crackling stop was my brother Bob. He would talk matter of fact positively about how all was going to run its course and we would, before you know it, be out under a mesquite shootin' doves, drinkin' Dublin Dr. Pepper. As he would talk I would rest.

Sometimes I would go over to the church office just to be around the staff even though people were painful. Sometimes I would go into the sanctuary when it was empty – the sanctuary I had labored for 30 years just to see it become a reality – and once it became one, I became a phantom and a ghost. I would stand behind the pulpit and look out on the sanctuary and long to be back. And not knowing why I wasn't or what I had. But dawn began to break.

One day my doctor called again just to ask Teresa how I was doing. Teresa, for the first time, broke down. "You've got to do something!" My doctor said he was going to talk to his Hindu friend who was a psychiatrist who had helped his mother-in-law through depression. The word "psychiatrist" made me recoil as this was a field of study concerned in secular thought. A "Hindu psychiatrist" was as bizarre a combination of terms as I had

ever heard. It actually is an oxymoron (trust me). Anyway when my doctor visited with his friend, the friend acted unworried. He said, "I talk to people like him every day. He is a garden variety case of anxiety from continual stress. He needs to take Lorazepam to help him sleep and that he will not be anxious about sleep. That eliminates 5 p.m. – 7 a.m. as an area of stress. So half the problem is solved. Fourteen hours taken care of. He needs to carry one milligram of Lorazepam (this would be the same as Ativan or Xanax), so if the day becomes anxious he can eliminate the problem. He won't need it permanently but just until he gets the worst of this behind him. And then we need an SSRI to build back his serotonin level." He explained it like this. Adrenaline is good but only in bursts, not continual, because a by-product of adrenaline is the hormone, cortisol (the stress hormone). Too much cortisol inhibits serotonin production in the brain. Serotonin is a neuro-transmitter that allows your brain to work properly. Stress sets up a series of dominoes and by the time they all fall, you have depression/anxiety.

A few months earlier I would have thought it weak to be using a sleep aid and an anti-depressant because, like most, I thought depression to be merely sadness or discouragement. Until I got it. When you get it you will take whatever you need to if you think it will alleviate the symptoms long enough to deal with whatever got you into this mess.

So I began with what he told me. It was comforting to know that my Hindu psychiatrist (hard to believe I just wrote that) thought I was an average run-of-the-mill case of clinical depression. You just know in the midst of the ordeal that you have contracted an ancient disease with no known cure and are sure to be institutionalized. The psychiatrist also communicated through my doctor, a very important "heads up." That it would take six days to get by mild side-effects . . . like hot flashes. He said I might kind of feel flush or "like a menopausal woman" for a week. I think I now know. He also said that a SSRI enables your own Serotonin to build back up, after stress has depleted it. It takes about 3½ weeks to feel the effect.

I began sleeping eight hours. I took a pill (SSRI) called Lexapro. I began to work out again and to enjoy the evening time more.

. . . and I waited.

A few weeks later Teresa and I were sitting together eating. All of a sudden it lifted. Like the fog as the sunshine breaks. Whatever had been there since May – my constant dark specter, or what Winston Churchill called "The Black Dog" – well, it suddenly, gradually lifted just like it came.

I just sat there. Teresa stared at me. "What's the matter?" I said, "I'm me." I was afraid to move – like a cell phone that had found the beam. Like I was balancing a goldfish bowl on my head, afraid to move . . . It felt exquisite. The joy of normal. "I'm me."

I slowly and surely began to get my life back. In September I began to schedule little Bible studies. The first was the office staff. Then to any that wanted, I taught on Revelation 22.

It felt marvelous. The depression would “loop.” It would go away longer and come back weaker. Such would continue until it practically faded away. Like jumping a battery.

I had a great interest in what I had been through because I realized what a universal problem it was in the church. I was given the name of a psychiatrist in North Dallas – a Christian fellow, a former Harvard professor. Psychiatrists don’t do great amounts of counseling. They sub that out to others. Their job is in diagnosing and medicating mental problems.

I made an appointment and walked in his office. I confess that I felt like Saul going to the witch of Endor. I felt like at any time the spirit of Spurgeon was going to rise from the earth and condemn me. But he was a 50ish Christian man attending an evangelical church, who coached his son in baseball. He was sitting, clothed, and in his right mind. He asked me what the said Hindu had communicated via my doctor. Then he said, “He was dead on.” I spent an hour with him mainly asking questions to try to understand this malady that I was beginning to see was a closet malady in the Christian world. One on the down-low. I was discovering all kinds of people who had it but never mentioned it.

The psychiatrist said depression and clinical anxiety are common in America and becoming more common. America is an intense country . . . an ambitious, fast-moving, capitalistic, materialistic culture where people are driven. He said God has so rigged the heavens that the earth turns every 24 hours. We are forced to stop work, eat, and sit calmly in the darkness . . . lit by moon and stars, less we be in total darkness . . . as these are the restive hours, designed to be in quiet, reading, with family. But thanks to Mr. Ford and Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Edison we have light, cars and gasoline. We can schedule, load up, and go. We can turn night into day. We don’t rest. Some say you feel America when you fly in from any other country.

He also said with an introductory, “If it’s any consolation . . .” and then, “this usually only happens to successful people.” He continued “. . . those who are 24-7, on call, driven, who love what they do and take no time to rest.” He said further, “The culprit is adrenaline for stress. But the body doesn’t differentiate ‘happy’ adrenaline from ‘stressed-out’ adrenaline. Meaning, you can burn out doing what you love.

It’s been almost 10 years now. I had to make some changes. I had to make a choice of how many jobs I wanted. Between pastor, conference speaker, Young Guns director and author. I was now content just with pastor.

I gave up my Song of Solomon conferences. I put Young Guns on the shelf for three years and in 2015 I let Charles Stolfus take the reins and I just teach for 1½ hours a week. I also dropped the faculty study and gave the Tuesday Lewisville study to three staff men to teach. I’ve only written one book since 2006. God gave me back the delight of the early mornings. I rarely travel and I enjoy weekends. Most of all my evenings have become my most delightful time. The boys are married, our nest is empty. The evening silence and shade is pleasant. I read. I study. I withdraw once a day and pray. I write, not for a deadline, but for pure enjoyment. I create. I got a Keurig and good coffee. Blue Bell.

Maybe what's the most delightful are my Sundays. They are pure enjoyment. Remember, I moved into the building right before I entered Dante's 9th circle of hell. I really never got to enjoy it. Now I do. I delight in the choir. The orchestra. The specials. The quality of the sound system. The acoustics (which are the best). I love the ethos of the columns out front. I love the foyer. The male donut eaters soon-to-die fellowship at 8:30 – Bobby's favorite fellowship. I love the noise of people enjoying being together in church. I enjoy the parking lot and watching people like doves coming to roost. I love Sunday nights with so much a concentration of the young and it's at times ex-otic visitors.

Most of all, however, it gave me an unwanted expertise and thus ministry to those going through depression.

I spoke to the Dallas Seminary chapel on what it was like to go through it and what can help to keep someone from going through it, particularly those in the ministry. I also talked to them about having someone in your congregation who has been through it as your "go to guy" to meet with those that are struggling and giving them some guidance. Each church also needs to locate a doctor or psychiatrist in the area they can trust to properly medicate.

After I spoke to DTS I had a line of people wanting to talk. Howard Hendricks found me and said it was one of the five most significant chapels since he had been at Dallas Seminary. And that was since the late 40s.

But ever since that day, I became "The Depression Guy." I used to be "The Song of Solomon Guy." I've spoken to LeTourneau College about depression. To Southwest Seminary. To a Southern Baptist pastor's conference. On Focus on the Family with James Dobson. On Family Life Today with Dennis Rainey. And there has rarely been a week go by that some tormented soul has not gone online and found my DTS chapel and then called or emailed to say "help." I and one of the first Young Guns and now Christian counselor, Steve Leavitt, have written a book on our ordeal with depression/anxiety.

Not to presume upon God's ways but I think His purpose through all of it was not simply to give me a new area of ministry but to restore my joy. I, like all people, had taken for granted the simple joy . . . the Edenic joy . . . of just existing, breathing and feeling joy. The greatest happiness is the absence of pain, but it takes pain to learn that.

Life is no longer just a drive to achieve, impart and serve but now it's also a joy to each day. Wake up and enjoy – Him.

God knew better than me what the desire of my heart was and He indeed gave it to me.

I'm me.

The Guy in the Tie
Part XXI Reflections

Well I'm up to the present. The last 10 years brought me back to the delights of the life with which I started. Reading, studying, enjoying the contemplative things in the evenings in the quiet with my wife, two dogs, a feral cat and a chicken, six grandkids, taking a few good men to maturity, and writing. Eden with clothes on.

Let me reflect first on what I now have to do. First, I need to finish. To finish means you live your life faithfully and "on point" until your last breath. My family, both sides, are not known for living long. Most Nelson men die before 70. I don't anticipate being that old. I do want to live till the end as in my full strength. I do not want to spend my life traveling and just watching my grandkids grow up. I don't mind either of those two things but not as the end purpose of my life. I would like to be more than an observer of nature and others lives. In that sense I do not want to retire but to pass on into the next generation. To find the Joshuas and Elishas of tomorrow, today. To live on in other men's lives.

But though the Bible doesn't teach retirement from Christian service it does teach transition, most modeled by Christ. It teaches the wise passing on of the torch to the next generation. It is at this point that there are fewer examples of properly leaving one's post than achieving one's place. Men in the Bible plan to leave. One can embarrass himself by hanging on too long. I have watched old pastors torpedo their ship before they left. Charles Hodge half-seriously said no man should be allowed to speak after 80. I'm about out of time. I doubt my vociferous vociferality will hold out that long. I don't want to leave when everyone wants me to. I want my best work to be insuring the next man's success.

I also want DBC to continue to be an outpost. A sanctuary for the pure doctrine of the Bible and a place zealous believers are fostered and not run off.

And with that let me get all "old geezer" on you.

Many of the new guys worry me, the guys in the pulpits.

Too many of them are sociologists. Let me explain. In the 70s we were all (i.e. all evangelicals), theologians ready to defeat neo-orthodoxy and the rising tide of the charismatic movement. In the 80s everyone became a psychologist as so many social and marital and personal dysfunctions began to arise. In the 90s the mega-church arose. Christian Wal Marts. Churches adopted hyper-organizational models. The Willowcreek model prevailed. "Seeker sensitive" to the unchurched world. Pastors now became CEOs. They preached to perceived needs, and then stopped lest people become challenged or offended. Sermons were dumbed down to the lowest common denominator. Churches all began to look like Raytheon. Imposing. Efficient . . . Masses of people skillfully organized and processed. Church architecture reflected this.

Prior to the 60s we built churches that looked like churches. Sanctuaries. Then churches began to take on a futuristic modern look.

In the 70s we built functional churches to play field hockey after services. Churches looked like gyms.

By the 90s churches looked like office buildings. We were organizational wizards.

By the turn of the century pastors became entertainers. Churches became theatres and sound stages. Pastors got press agents, security guards, and labored for radio and TV spots. Pastors got headsets, dressed down, dressed young and paced the stage, appealing to Gen X. Christianity as perceived in our country for 200 years began to become extinct.

Now, the young guys are sociologists. They speak of “trajectories, target groups, demographics, Gen Y, Millennials” and the like. The key word is “culture.” The young are sought. Boomers, now grandparents, tend to be forgotten and sacrificed along with their tradition.

It seems that Bible exposition has waned. Theology has become non-existent. The pulpit is to “fix-it” not to enlighten. To be relevant not glorious. The connection of the church today to the church of history has been broken and left behind with its tradition and hymns. The church as the unique sanctuary of God has evolved.

A culture is to be reached but by a truth to be raised. A banner of truth that the elect rally unto. In its place appears at times to be “community” alone to mend a lonely individualistic dysfunctional culture.

Ah, I’m but an old man grumbling.

But as I have said, Denton Bible was not a church that anyone planned. It was born out of providential circumstances by God’s sovereignty. I have been a mere foreman, steward, servant, under-shepherd, and ranch manager.

It, we, DBC belongs and has always belonged only to God. I would like to see a bastion of truth continue. A fortress, an embassy of heaven down here on earth. A church where no matter what the world does or where the world goes – that on the corner of 380 and Nottingham there will be a banner and a voice saying, “Here we stand.” A church that has not trimmed its sails to the changing winds but a church on a rock. A church that when I am dead and all our elders are dead and our staff and present congregants are dead and Christ comes for His church, that we will still be there with a next generation “holding forth the word of life.” Reaching the present by affirming the great Protestant traditions.

I have always wanted DBC to be a place of craftsmanship. A place where quality works of art are produced. Theologically sound, pure, visionary, workmen of the word, able to defend their position. Navy Seals. Rangers. Green Beret. Delta Force.

So what have 40 years to date taught me?

Here are my penseses.

Here are my reflections on what I have learned through the existence of '73 to 2015.

1. There must be certain truths that are “hills you will die on.”
 - Inerrancy verbal and plenary
 - A monergistic salvation. i.e. salvation as an act of God’s solitary grace. From election to resurrection.
 - The sufficiency and completeness of salvation. i.e. no 2nd blessing but Saints complete at salvation.
 - Faith alone in Christ’s atonement as all that is required by God
 - The priesthood of all believers
 - The historic Adam. i.e. creation. Not theistic evolution
 - The Biblical separation of male and female roles in the home and in the church
 - Church discipline
 - Elder rule or the autonomy of the local church
 - A pre-trib rapture of the church
 - A literal kingdom over all the earth ruled by Christ or the distinction of Israel and the church
 - The literal eternal state of the lost in hell as well as the saved in heaven
 - The full divinity of all three members of the Trinity
 - The historic Biblical view of sexuality and marriage.

These are non-negotiables.

These are points for which I will lose my ministry.

Hills I will die on.

But . . .

2. The greatest challenge to the stability of a church is not necessarily departures from the truth but additions. A church can depart to the right as easily as to the left. It is when the church canonizes as a rule what the Bible does not teach. A church that seeks control. i.e.
 - Nothing but home school
 - No alcohol of any sort. The enforcement of tea-totaling
 - No birth control.
 - No non-Christian music
 - No pants on women or makeup
 - No movies, etc. etc.

One may not do any of these. That is conviction. To forbid as a rule is legalism.

It would be great if we just had rules and did not have to think, bend, or be gracious. But God demands that we respond to higher things than rules – like His glory and others’ good. It’s called Christ-likeness.

3. The church must have a standard of discipleship that is honoring to the disciplined, the obedient and fruitful. It cannot merely stress attending church and learning as all you will accumulate are students. There must be a small group with a standard, a transferable curriculum, a time limit, and an expectation to become a teacher of others. i.e. an inside track for the minority of zealous Christians (and they are the minority). The mediocre won't care. The zealous, however, will leave if denied such.
4. There are seven things Satan will use to render Christians ineffective.
 - Deception: Getting into bad doctrine.
 - Disqualify: Overt sin removes the right to be heard.
 - Distraction: When a Christian's values and priorities become worldly.
 - Divisiveness: When a Christian can't function with others.
 - Discouragement: When defeat, being wronged, or bitterness with life makes one fail to persevere.
 - Danger: When Christians love their life and/or men's approval more than faithfulness. When fear governs them.
 - Depth: When a Christian does not read the Bible but only lives out of the habits of the faith with no virile personal time with God, they are shallow.
5. A child must have eight essential vitamins:
 - Peace: A tranquil, ordered, safe, living environment.
 - Esteem: Loved unconditionally no matter who he or she is.
 - Acceptance: Loved unconditionally no matter what they do.
We may not be pleased but we always love.
 - Affection: Love with skin on it. Constant affirmation.
 - Models: A parent who is a living replica of that which is desirable or noble.
 - Truth: A parent who explains scripture and provides church and nurturing.
 - Discipline: When a child knows that he is loved enough that godless behavior will not be tolerated.
 - Protection: Evil ideas, evil environment, evil people are reasonably kept to a minimum.

These are the eight essential vitamins of a child.
6. Some people have dreams. Others have vision. The difference between the two is a plan to attain. Initiative to begin. Perseverance to go from one step to the other and to finish. God had such a plan for the week of creation and His plan for salvation. Both were pronounced "finished."
7. Unless a person has the above, his life will become boring and seemingly meaningless. And then he may do something bizarre, especially about age 40.
8. People tend to put amusements in place of meaning. Amusements all become old in time. A life of devotion to God's purpose becomes more and more satisfying and substantial as life progresses.

9. There is no greater joy than cultivating a contemplative and quiet life of reading, prayer, and study in the quiet of early morning or darkening hours. There is no more peaceful place than a fireplace and a good book. It will last until the last hours of life.
10. Life is usually the small things we enjoy on the way to our ambitions. A quiet meal, a really quality movie, an illuminating book, a Rangers' game, a walk on the midway with a fried anything, watching grandkids play, looking at an old album or browsing in a really good antique shop. Such things are the marrow of Eden.
11. Marriage is exciting when you're young but more enjoyable and meaningful when you're old. Never give up the latter which is to come because of the waning of the former.
12. The fountain of all of life is an individual's personal relationship to God and His word. There must be a discipline whereby a Christian withdraws to read, meditate and pray. And then a resolve to act upon the word as its teaching arises in choices we must make. All we will be and are comes from this fountain.
13. Significant Christians, without fail, are surrounded by those of like commitment. "He who walks with wise men will be wise. The companion of fools suffers harm." "As iron sharpens iron."
14. A marital relationship that begins in immorality is like building a fire with lighter fluid. It looks like a quick and mighty fire but it is surfacy and non-substantial. It will fade quickly to a disappointing flicker unless it moves on to the more substantial. A marriage begun with passion as its basis will have to at some point halt and make some new resolves.
15. Always in finances honor God first in giving
then pay your debts and obligations
then pay yourself in an increasing savings that you do not touch
then have fun and enjoyment and do good with what is left
This will keep you from covetousness and entanglements.
16. You are not a good parent merely because you restrict your child. You must grant them trust as they prove responsible. A child merely restricted, especially a boy, will feel resentful and when he is able he will prove himself "a man" by burning down all around him. A parent's job is to train a child to mature into the total freedom to "leave father and mother . . ." Freedom and trust must be gradually earned.
17. The purpose of a church is to produce a church member who is committed to Christ, His word, His people, and His cause. Then to produce one who is competent to

know the truth, feel passionately about the truth and be able to do some basic things, like having a quiet time, sharing their faith, and discipling others, and lastly to be creative. Meaning that they will be able to flourish wherever they are for the rest of their lives. To be able to survive, to labor and be fruitful wherever they are with nothing but a Bible.

18. A church must then have an organization that will produce such people.

- It must teach God's word not just erect rules or put people on guilt trips.
- It must train them through small groups. Groups that anyone can do – Discovery groups and groups that not everyone can do – discipleship groups. (c.f. #3)
- It must trust people. Meaning that when a layman has finished discipleship they must be entrusted with the possibility to succeed or fail.
- And the church must provide time to be able to be in small group discipleship. If your people are “auditing” on Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, another night will encroach on their family. A church should not just work hard but work smart. Activities must contribute to discipleship no matter how long established and venerated those activities may be. I like to see Christians progressing not just busy. Remember Mary and Martha.

19. A church must then have elders and staff that will operate that system that produces faithful Christians.

The staff and the elders must be orthodox in their doctrine. Biblical.

They must have moral integrity or orthopraxy. Consistency in life.

They must be philosophically or ministerially sound. All must be committed to teaching, training, and entrusting, i.e. the Great Commission. All must be sold on what “success” means. Congregations follow models not just orders.

They must be socially adept. They must be team men. They must get along with others and work as a unit.

20. Once a pastor or a staff member hires on at a church they should stay until they have made that church stronger than when they arrived. Church staff should never use the local church to merely advance their careers and jockey for position by bounding from church to church. Leave only when another man can come take over a better situation than when you came or when you see that it's a bad fit and a disaster.

21. A church should never let staff go because someone else comes along who might do a “better job” or someone in leadership feels that “we're going a new direction.” Nor do you let them go because you don't see the growth you hoped you might see. The church is not a business nor are we run like one. When you hire someone they have quit where they were to trust your appraisal. If a man struggles where he is placed or proves to be out of place, that is my problem for a mis-hire. If I can't help him or move him to another spot then I need to take care of him until he finds a proper fit

at another job. But you don't fire him, and hang him out to dry. That is ecclesiastic abuse.

22. There are only seven reasons to let a staff go.

- If they depart from the doctrinal position of the church.
- If they become immoral or have some other moral stain or inconsistency.
- If they are disrespectful to the elder board or pastor.
- If they cause trouble among other staff or cannot get along with people. They cannot be divisive.
- If they depart from the ministerial purpose of discipleship.
- If they habitually mishandle their budget or are not above reproach in financial or budgetary policy of the church.
- If they do not attempt to perform their ministerial obligations. If they are lazy.

23. Anyone can make disciples who can communicate basic doctrine, master basic life skills, and impart basic ministry skills. All you need is time, grace, and a faithful student. And the faith in God to step out and try.

24. I am asked, "Is there a technique to preaching?" There is a progression that all good teachers/preachers follow. If they are successful they all do four things.

- Focus: This is when you study a text and know what its meaning is – its central meaning.
The key word is study.
- Flow: This is when you understand how the text develops or "flows." It is the outline of the text.
The key word is progression.
- Flower: This is where the text takes on its presentation. It is where the text in the pulpit comes to life. It involves cross references, illustrations, reasoning, quotations, citing other writers and preachers, stories and vignettes, books or movies as cross references. It's what makes the message "pop" and come alive. It's what separates a merely theologically and exegetically precise message from an exciting and enjoyable message.
The key word is creativity.
- Friction: This is where you say, "What difference does it make?" It's where you rub your hand along the text to feel for a rasp or a burr where the text gets at odds with our lives and culture – i.e. "friction." In some ways the text is meant to challenge us and change our thinking or living.
The key word is application.

I start on my sermon Sunday afternoon after church. I like to get the focus by Monday, the flow by Tuesday. The flower takes till Thursday. By that time the friction becomes self-evident. The hardest point is flower. It's not a technique but delving into the text's soul and your own imagination.

25. There is a path to an affair . . . an E-asiness

- Eliminate tenderness, respect, and passion in one's own marriage.
- Encounter a third party who provides those things.
- Enjoyment is inevitable.
- Expedite that enjoyment by deliberately spending more time with that person.
- Express to that person, guardedly, how you feel and if received . . .
- Experience the seeming "fountain of youth."
 . . . and then descend into a living death

To be continued

The Guy in the Tie Part XXI
Reflections (*cont'd*)

Continuing with the reflections from my ministry in Denton these 40 plus years...

26. Counseling is a relatively simple idea – theoretically.

- People must recognize the choices that have gotten them to their distressed state
- And then the beliefs that fostered such actions
- And then the family, societal, business and cultural forces that have influenced them
- And then what will be the inevitable consequences to continue
- And then the new possibility of a biblical choice
- . . . from a new perspective and system of thought
- Then time . . . to slowly encourage them, guide them and apply pressure and accountability . . .

But 90% of it begins with number one. Most counseling is like getting the last pea on the plate with a spoon. Until there is mourning and repentance there will be no change.

27. Elders (I believe) should not be elected by a congregation.

- The congregation as a whole is not that mature to know what a leader should be.
- Nor do they have an intimate knowledge of who that person is in private.
- Each faction of the church will instinctively put forth their “champion” and rally support. Then . . .
- Each champion and faction will be bitter when rejected.
- There is no precedence for voting in the Bible. It is a democratic concept not a Biblical one.
- In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas selected elders.
- Paul writes to Timothy and Titus to select and appoint elders.
- A congregation vote is a congregation split.

An elder board should stay at about 12 (I believe) because it's easier to steer a jet ski than a barge. God who knows the hearts of men will make elders identifiable. There is no foolproof system of elder selection but the unanimity of the existing board is the least chance of disaster.

28. What is a pastor's relation to the elders? They are not his rubber stamp and “yes men.” I never make any pastoral move without the elders' approval. If 12 other men know that something is right then I can rest assured in the will of God. I can't imagine leading out without the counsel of good men. But a pastor is not merely part of the elder board. He is given to the church as a pastor – one who feeds,

protects and leads. His leadership is to be sought and honored. The elder board is to be revered in counsel. Together they form the church's guidance.

29. No pastor should have direct access to church finances. Never should he have control over money or the checkbook. To do so is to ask for a scandal. Money causes more problems than anything.
- No one person should be able to write checks.
 - A number of persons should collect the money and count it.
 - At least two persons transport it.
 - Every expenditure by any church staff or representative should be reimbursed only with a receipt and then within a specified time limit.
 - Any expenditure over a specified amount should be cleared by a finance committee just to make sure that the expenditure is for ministry purposes.
 - All giving records should be private except to specified persons.
 - Money should never become a dominant point in the pulpit as it should never be pressured.
 - The church should keep debt at an absolute minimum.
 - The church should have a financial administrator as quickly as needed. You can't afford not having one.

30. If ever a doctrinal, sexual, financial, or any such transgression occurs, the church should never try to cover it up. It may not need to make some things as public as others but within the parameters that the transgression affects, those people need to hear it addressed.

Christians do not have a problem with sin occurring within a church but they do have a problem with cover-ups.

If you address it too broadly it is seen as vindictiveness and that is bad.

If too slow then gossip will spread and then you've got a worse problem. Check it out. Make certain of guilt. Act decisively and mercifully. Restore the guilty all you can.

31. Getting a church to give is no real problem. To get a church to gather to pray is virtually impossible. Only 9-11 was successful.
32. I've pastored young folks with fewer of the old. I've pastored the old with fewer of the young. The latter is easier and more enjoyable. The former is exciting and full of hope. A persistent lack of the latter is also fatal. A lack of the former produces an errant minded young Christian with an unreal view of the church and humanity.
33. We have never had a concern about giving at DBC. We rarely preach on it unless it naturally occurs in the text. But when you feed, enlighten, and encourage the saints, their hearts are full and their joy is expressed in giving.

Christians should be treated like mature sons . . . not like children under rules.

34. A Christian woman in today's culture who can take younger Christian women through the specifics of Titus 2:3-5 can spend the rest of her life impacting the next generation. Too few women, in my opinion, have taken up that cause.
35. Couples with solid marriages can make as big an impact as they want by doing nothing but taking engaged couples through premarital counseling. They can save couples from immeasurable pain.
36. I have never recovered from the proposition of a Bible. A book from the Almighty in human language speaking of every essential issue. I have never understood how a child of God could not have a fervency to know it and meet God in its pages.
37. I have a favorite ministerial verse that has strengthened me as long as I have served Him.
"The eyes of God move to and fro throughout the whole earth that he might strongly support the one whose heart is perfect toward Him."
(2 Chronicles 16:9)

This doesn't mean that God's eyes are searching for that man because God knows where he is. But rather that God is looking throughout the world for the resources to support him. Resources beyond that man's understanding that God will bring. Like Nehemiah who prayed and had the Persian king write him a blank check.

Paul said, "My God shall supply your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus." This is the same idea.

Christ as God has the entire world as His servant and at His command. And it is His to give to us. So I don't ever want to not trust God to fulfill His plans.

38. The church is not a business. It can't be evaluated like a business nor can it be run like a business. It is a family. It is a kingdom of priests who pray and preach and trust the sovereign providence of God to convert then develop His people. The bottom line is the maturity of the people.
39. Staff in a church cannot be run like a business. When I meet with staff it is not to discuss gas receipts and budget expenditures. Nor is it to count noses as to how many are coming to their events. The only questions I ask are, "Who do you have in discipleship?" "How are your small groups?" Numbers are not necessarily indicators. We come together as a staff to study, be exhorted and pray. To rekindle holy passion.

I am not interested in when they show up in the office or what their dress code is. I expect them to be as passionate as I am. I have never been asked in 40 plus years to

work harder or do more. My problem has been depression from emotional exhaustion, from overworking and trying to do too much. I don't need staff that has to be kept tabs on. I don't have time to keep tabs on people who are not zealous for Christ.

40. A church must, as must the individual saint, always be visionary. To be as David, wondering if there is a Mephibosheth out there who needs to know of the mercy of God. Is there a Nahash the Ammonite who needs to be comforted? To say as Paul, "I hope to see you in passing and to be helped by you on my way to Rome." To always ask, "What else O God can we be doing?"
41. The pulpit is the place where the Bible is exalted and proclaimed. It is the place that the Biblical and ethical standard of morality or righteousness is clarified. Where men distinguish the clean from the unclean. It is also the place where the gospel is continually clarified and magnified. And it is also the place where vision is cast. A place where the church's duty to enact the Great Commission of evangelism and discipleship is exhorted. It is the prow of a ship cutting through hostile waters.
42. Most pastors are prepared for the entrance of cults and heresies. But cults are not the great problems. A cult is easily identifiable and easily refuted. The greater problem is not departing from scripture but adding to scripture. It is those who do not merely hold to personal ideas but who canonize them, and hold that all others must as well. And then to make life miserable for those of different opinions, and become a divisive and schismatic force in the body. In other words, the Pharisee.
43. For a man to be a pastor or for any person, man or woman, to be in the professional ministry there must be certain things that are in place.
 - He must be orthodox in his view of inerrancy and historic Protestantism. God will not bless what is offensive to the truth of heaven.
 - He must be spiritually gifted. God will equip a man to build what God has commanded. He will not make men build bricks without straw. Study and preaching must come easily.
 - He must be morally upright. God will not bless a hypocrite.
 - He must be passionate. The ministry is not a rational or just career decision. A man preaches because God has inflamed his soul. It is passion that drives you and carries you.
 - He must be proven. He doesn't go from 0 to 60. He must have won people to Christ, disciplined them and led Bible studies.
 - He must be shown to be a team man and a servant. He must work and play well with others.
 - The leaders of the body of Christ, the elders, of an existing church must have seen him as faithful in the body.
 - He must be visibly social and enjoy people. Pastors who don't like to be around people will not generally succeed in relating to them from a pulpit.

44. One of the pressing inquiries I hear is, “How do you know the will of God?” When people ask this they do not mean the revealed will of God or the moral will of God. Not the right or wrong will of God but rather the right or left. The non-moral or unrevealed will. Should I buy this car? Should we wait to have kids? Should we move to Virginia to take this new job?

How do we find the right or left will of God?

- Number one is that you don’t have to make an unrevealed thing a revealed thing. You don’t have to get a sign or have a dream or see a vision. You don’t have to turn your Bible into a crystal ball or a deck of tarot cards and get mystic symbolic inferences. God does not ever in scripture tell us to “find” an unrevealed thing. God doesn’t hold us accountable for non-moral choices.
- Secondly, how would we find it? What means would you have in appropriating God’s mind?
- Thirdly, how would we *know* our finding was true?
- Fourthly, God gives us freedom in non-moral areas. Does He have a providential plan that oversees our free choices? Certainly. But that is **His** area of guidance. Not mine. Part of being human and in the image of God is a sense of freedom. The freedom to do what I desire as long as it does not contradict revealed truth.

As Nathan said to David, “Do what you wish for God is with you.”

- Fifthly, there *is* a fact of God “placing upon my heart” a longing. (Neh. 2:12) Or as Paul said to the Romans, “for I long to come and see you.”
- Sixthly, get counsel – indeed “an abundance of counselors” – before you make a decision. Because no decision is unique – others have had to make it.
- No one in the Bible is ever held guilty for a non-moral or non-revealed choice.
- God can still open or close doors to guide our choices (Romans 1, 15).
- Right and left decisions do not get us into serious trouble. Immoral decisions do.
- Neutral decisions can turn out painful but that is not to be avoided. Such is life and such is learning.
- Also make durn certain it IS indeed neutral. Ask a wise Christian. What one thinks is neutral choice may not be.

The word “naïve” in Greek means “no evil.” When in reality evil *was* present.

45. All men have a deficiency called “self-respect.” We spend our lives seeking a way to establish our worth and success. Women also have a deficiency called “tenderness” whereby she longs to be treated as honorable.

When a man and woman meet, they instinctively provide this need. The man is tender and chivalrous and kind. He provides the deficiency she craves. The woman is instinctively respectful. She laughs at his jokes and is awed at his brains, talent, and might. Both of them provide what the other needs and they think, “We need a lifetime of this esteem!” They get married based upon the enormous premise that this initial conduct will never change.

The problem is that the other's conduct is an instinct not a discipline. It often is a means of acquiring, not of serving. As a result their conduct now ends once the objective is met. Both of the couple goes into withdrawal. Then they try to manipulate to get that which they experienced earlier. Often they give up and look for someone else who will meet that need. The cycle begins anew. It will continue until the realization that respect and tenderness must be a discipline, a choice, an act of love and service – then deep emotion returns.

It's why the three stages of marriage are:

1. The honeymoon: meaning "sweet month."
2. The disillusionment: It's when you discover the sinner you married.
3. The commitment: It's when a couple matures into the resolve and act of love.

46. Don't despair if your son does not quickly surrender his heart to Christ. It takes a young man time to connect the dots. "God . . . character . . . job . . . money . . . woman . . . car." Boys are all rogue leaders . . . leaders who don't want to follow, until they are convinced in their souls. Don't despair over your downy little eaglet.
47. But don't rejoice too quickly if your young daughter memorizes scripture and sings in the choir. Little girls learn to please. They can appear precociously religious. But some day there may be a man in their lives that they also would like to please in order to be seen as special. Keep praying and don't flatter her in her spirituality. Whisper to her, "Your test is coming."
48. There are a couple of things that every pastor will learn if he is going to survive the ministry. One is that success in the ministry will not come from merely organization, good preaching or discipleship and evangelistic programs. It will come by God's grace. "I planted, Apollos watered . . . but God causes the growth. So neither he who plants or waters is anything but God who causes the growth." (1 Cor. 3:6-7)

The ministry is impossible. "Apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15) The ministry is magic. It's miraculous. God the Holy Spirit must cause dead men to live, deaf men to hear the shepherd's voice, and blind men to see the glory of Christ. ". . . flesh and blood did not reveal this to you but my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 16)

Thus we lift up the cross to draw the elect. We pray. We trust God the Holy Spirit to act on our behalf. He will not leave us as orphans.

And there is another thing every minister has to learn. We are not going to win in this world. We are not going to convert the world – that is why we have a Tribulation, because both Israel and the world will reject our message.

Most ministers are secretly post-mil and feel they will bring in the kingdom. If they don't become pre-mil they will suffer discouragement. Also, our flesh will not be changed until the day of Christ when we shall all be changed. Success is that we "keep the faith" and "fight the good fight" and "finish the course." But we won't "win" until the King shows up. Until then we stay true like Robin Hood until Richard comes.

49. I've discovered in experience what the Bible continually preaches in truth. The simpler, more contemplative, more rustic and bucolic that a life is – the better it is. Sin, wealth, possessions, debt and excessive activity – responsibilities and obligations – complicates life. There is something in life that tends to complexity. There is also something, however, that makes us migrate to Walden Pond. To the country and evening shade. To loved ones visiting on the patio swing. To coffee and good books. To fireplaces and good dogs. To grandkids and family and a good meal.

No place was as peaceful and quiet and simple as Eden. Only the eternal city in Revelation 21-22 is as glorious. The Christian is to re-cultivate such love and simplicity.

Protect your early mornings. Reserve them for reading and prayer. Protect your evenings. Wind down. Limit your kid's activities so as not to sacrifice your home. Have a hobby you love. A good book waiting on you. Enjoy time on the couch talking.

Live well. "The fruit of the Spirit is . . . peace. . ." (Galatians 5)

50. Don't expect your teenager to be something you were not. We all have stories of some sort when we were young where we tested the boundaries of independence. Don't try to make your house like "Little House on the Prairie." It won't happen. Recognize that there are few stupider creatures than a teenager. (Think back.) What would you do if your kid was doing half of the things you successfully kept hidden from your parents?
- Raise them the best you can.
 - Stay affectionate.
 - Don't load them down with guilt when they stumble.
 - Let them grow up on their time.
 - Take lots of pictures to laugh at later.
 - Don't despair. You didn't fail.
 - White water is normal for all parents. As Samuel. David. Adam. Joseph and Mary (Remember Mary and Joseph's four other sons? John 7:5).

To be continued...

The Guy in the Tie
Reflections *continued*

I press on...

51. Significant Christians are significant not because they are perfect but because they struggle well with essential things for their entire life.

- Quiet time with God
- Moral purity
- Confessing sin
- Keeping eternal values
- Getting along with people in the church, etc. etc.

Fight the good fight. Nobody gets to coast.
“The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit.”
Struggle well, victoriously, and long.

52. A single person is a stream trickling down getting stronger and wider through the years. When they marry they flow into another stream and become a tributary. They have children and become a river. The kids marry into families with kids who marry into families and now you have an Amazon with rapids. Lives gather steam. But when a couple becomes unfaithful to their covenant and their mate they smite the waters, often into a trickle.

Let nothing harm your river. “He, who troubles his own house, inherits the wind.”
(Proverbs)

53. Never do anything to make you stay awake from a troubled conscience. If you cheat on your mate, embezzle, cheat on your income tax, lie and slander, erupt in rage, you will always wonder if it's going to be found out or catch up with you. H. L. Mencken said, “Always make the decision you can best shave with.” Nothing is more wonderful than a clear conscience. “God gives to His beloved sleep.” (Psalm 127:2)

54. Successful Christians all do certain things in life well.

- They fear God: This is the recognition of God's position as Creator. That all things are created by Him and thus all must comply with His revealed will.
- A knowledge of scripture: Wise men long to know the mind of God and are disciplined to do so. Men *must* garner wisdom of their creator.
- The subduing of the body: “I buffet my body and make it my slave.” “Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies.” “Sin is crouching at your door, its desire is for you, but you must master it.” You *must* be able to say “no” to your body.
- The ability to make relationships: A person who cannot is going to have a distressing, painful, lonely life.

- The ability to handle authority: Everyone at any point of life is going to have to submit to the authority above him. Not to handle authority is to go from one disaster and upset to the next.
- The ability to work or a work ethic. A work ethic means you have a moral standard as a worker. That your motive is pride in yourself and a standard of excellence and not just getting a check. People that work hard are going to rise because they are few and far between. A lazy and irresponsible worker is going to lead a life that moves downward from failure to failure.
- The ability to make independent moral decisions . . . in other words, to stand against peer pressure and do what is right just because it is right. It is the quality called "moral courage." Doing what is right simply because it is right without the support of the majority. "The companion of fools will suffer harm." (Proverbs) With a morally weak man it is just a matter of time before he is overpowered and led astray by those about him.
- Proper values: Your values determine your priorities. Your priorities determine your choices. Your choices determine your destiny. One can either serve God and the eternal or serve men and the pride of life. Those who serve men will strive to succeed in the wrong things.
- The ability to handle money. From learning to tithe, responsibilities to debts and bills, knowing how to budget, staying out of unneeded and oppressive debt, wise expenditures, and setting aside in savings. It's hard to enjoy life when the unwise use of money makes you fear tomorrow and walk on eggshells today.
- Navigating the bumps and white water of life. No one can go through life without pain and unexpected distress. Finances, job change, disease and health concern, children and their struggles, parents and aging concerns, marital struggles, accidents. The truth is not how to avoid these but how to take them in stride and move through them.
- How to be a proper husband. "He who troubles his own house inherits the wind."
- How to be a proper wife. See the above.

55. So what are the basic needs of a wife? Or what does a woman think when a man says "I do?"

- A woman needs tenderness or sensitivity.
- A listener.
- A responsible provider. No woman longs for a bum.
- A spiritual leader.
- A man she respects or is proud to be his crown.
- An example for her children.
- Freedom to manage the house and make expenditures.
- Affection.
- Sexual fulfillment.
- Romance. Tender words.
- Security. Confidence in a husband's faithfulness.
- Honor . . . a fellow heir in the grace of live.

- Appreciation . . . to praise her in the gates and say, “Many daughters have done nobly but you excel them all.”
- Help around the house when asked.
- Support in her childrearing.
- Development. The freedom to grow and flourish personally.

56. What is a man thinking when a wife says “I do?”

- A man needs respect.
- A well-managed house. Food somewhat edible; not a burnt offering.
- A mother of his children.
- An attractive wife. Or a woman who will seek to maintain a degree of the beauty that attracted him.
- Not just sex but responsive sex. A wife that doesn’t endure sex for the sake of the preservation of the species.
- A crown. A wife who is respected by all. A man’s deepest pain is a wife who shames him.
- Submission. A wife who after counsel to her husband will respect his thoughtful decision.
- Affection.
- Appreciation of the sacrifices that a man must make.
- Chasteness: A woman who is not flirtatious or immodest.

57. Directing a church is like making moonshine whiskey. (Bet you’ve never heard this illustration.)

A lot of corn goes into the still to boil, but it is for the purpose of “corn squeezing”, which is the alcohol that “distills” and condenses and is separated to slowly drip into the jars. This is the object. Not to boil great amounts of corn but to separate out the “E-Lixer.”

So is church ministry.

Many people come but that is not our chief end. It is to get the “squeezins” – the small bottle of the separated “firewater.” A great many in a church do not want to be squeezed. They come periodically and want to be cared for when in trouble, to care for and marry off their children, and care for loved ones when they die. If you push them or require more they will leave. Chuck Swindoll once said they comprise 14% of your church.

But many are desirous of learning, seeking God’s hand and blessing on their lives and discipling others. If these folks are not challenged then they will leave.

It’s good to welcome and minister to all the family of God but a boiling and separation for a few quality people must occur for that church to impact the next generations.

58. Life is really the result of three crucial decisions.

- Who will be my Master? God or Satan
- What will be my Mission? This world's glory or the pleasure of heaven's reward.
- Who will be my Mate? One of merely physical beauty or one of heavenly character.

A happy life must have the first two and if at all possible the last also.

59. The greatest contribution to bible reading and bible study is learning church history. Church history is the story of western civilization from the book of Acts to present. That civilization that has most shaped world history.

If one will read Justo Gonzalez's Survey of Church History, a short overview work, and then his excellent The Story of Christianity, you will have a firm foundation. Then read Bruce Shelley's Plain Talk on Church History and you will be getting your facts in line.

If you will, add to that the specific history of thought. This is the evolution of human thought from the pre-Socratic Greeks unto present and how the church has both contributed to western thought and modified itself by western thought. Read Colin Brown's Christianity and Philosophy. Then Justo Gonzalez's History of Christian Thought. Then Francis Schaeffer's How Should We Then Live. Then James Sires' classic The Universe Next Door. You will be exceeding more intelligent than you were.

If you're a real seeker, read Richard Tarnas' Passion of the Western Mind and Luc Ferry's A Short History of Thought.

This is what the big boys eat to play like the big boys play. Above the rim.

60. Everyone should stay fit. If you will you won't have to bother with most of the ailments people bother with.

If you just do pushups every day and dumb bell curls along with walking and some crunches you will feel immeasurably better. I walk an hour a day and lift weights six days a week. I've been doing that since LBJ was president.

61. An observation over 45 years. Drugs and excessive alcohol make people irresponsible and weak. People do both of these to keep from having to deal with the problems of life head-on. It's easier to fade out with weed, coke, or booze so you don't have to face life.

I have never met a man I really respected that did drugs or drowned his sorrows. Both make for inferior humans who will not deal with reality. But I've met plenty who have repented, pulled away from the influence and led a new life. These folks I respect to the utmost.

62. I have found that there are certain ideas that are foundational to all of the Christian life.

Monergism is essential. Monergism means that salvation is a singular (mono) work (ergos). It is not a co-operation of God and man, but like the old creation, the new creation is a solitary work. "God who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts . . ." (II Cor. 4:6) Paul saw conversion as a solitary work of God as was the original creation.

God plans from eternity and predestines whom He shall save. Then Christ dies sufficiently for all their sin. Then God, through the Holy Spirit, "calls" or draws the elect to do what they would not, if left to themselves, and that is to freely repent and receive Christ as Savior. Not through their free will but a "freed will." A will freed from the bondage of sin and the bondage of the will by the efficacious grace and calling of God. A forensic justification imputed by God by God as the baptism of the Holy Spirit placed the justified in the body of Christ to share the life of its head, sealing them for salvation as God will raise our bodies. That is the salvation of God. Not an assist but a salvation. It is this belief that induces a deep love of God. It is this belief that induces the deepest humility and the deepest security of salvation. And it is this belief that produces a reverence for fellow saints.

63. Another essential belief is the relation of salvation to divine law. Being saved and being "under grace" means that the law of God – the expression of God's nature and will which are always best and blessed – is established naturally in a regenerated heart, now alive to God. The idea of a salvation that has no repentance, change, conversion, good works, or perseverance is alien to the very heart and intent of Christ's work of redemption.

64. Another essential belief is the finished and complete salvation that all Christians possess. From the early 1800s onward, however, there has been a continual idea within Protestantism to seek some sort of "second blessing" that will bring one into a more spiritual position before God.

Wesleyanism in the 1800s looked for "entire sanctification" where one had an event of "total surrender" that brought him into a state of "sinlessness."

This was followed by the Holiness Movement where there was a "second work of grace," the baptism of the Holy Spirit that brought one into "entire holiness."

The early 1900s saw the beginnings of Pentecostalism. Now, one had to not merely receive the Holy Spirit but he needed to subsequently speak in tongues to be truly saved.

- the Spirit
- sinlessness
- tongues

The list was getting longer. The separation was getting wider between the Christian “haves and have nots.”

By the 1960s another addition was made. Not only was one to speak in tongues but there would no longer be sickness and want but “health and prosperity.” At this point the holiness of earlier Pentecostalism was discarded. The “higher life” within Christianity was now marked by emotional excitation, health, and wealth. Christianity had now become American.

When these people get their “blessing” they now have something that all Christians could have but don’t and so now they become “evangelistic” that all might imbibe of their superior estate. The church now has varsity and JV Christians. “Haves and have nots.” Pride vs envy. We officially have division in the church.

When a person joins our church we review with them our beliefs. One of them is that we are not Pentecostal nor Charismatic. We believe we are complete in Christ from the moment of salvation. If someone differs we tell them that is their freedom; however, they are to respect our position and by no means to become evangelistic for their own position

Nothing can divide a church quicker than a second blessing or some “technique” by which spirituality can be attained. Pride and envy will inevitably follow.

65. I have observed that greatly significant Christians learn to strike one nail persistently. They do not flit and flutter here and there like little hummingbirds who buzz about but they find their gift and passion and continually perfect it. While they may pause and rest they do not start and stop.
66. One of the greatest pains of ministry is to see Christians who do not continue in faithfulness and service. To know that they are not on the cutting edge any longer. To remember days when they were faithful laborers. I feel the echo of Paul’s words, “that my labor should not be in vain.”
67. Evangelism. How is it done?
 - A person has to be intentional and plan to share Christ.
 - Then they must put themselves in the presence of lost men.
 - Then you learn how to simply initiate conversation. Jesus said, “Give me a drink.”

- Then you seize upon areas of common concern. Kids, the economy, the country, marriage, health. You share your experience and insight.
- You want to always be ready to share your testimony. A Christian does not merely have a body of truth he believes but also a testimony and experience.
- At some point in a witnessing situation you want to become “2nd person” – “What do you think?” Or “Have you come to the place where you know that God will let you in heaven?”
 - or “Have you trusted in Christ?”
 - or “Have you ever attended a church?”
- Ask for the permission to clearly explain the basic gospel.
 - a. God loves and created man.
 - b. Man has sinned and is guilty and cursed.
 - c. Jesus Christ has died for the sins of man to pay for his judgment before God.
 - d. To be forgiven, or saved, one must place his faith in Christ and receive Him as Savior.

These are basic truths of the gospel.

- a. God
 - b. Man
 - c. Christ
 - d. Faith
- Say it with love. If a person knows you love them you can be free to say anything.
 - Try to build a relationship. Once you have shared your faith don’t always try to talk about Christ but only as it presents itself. Be real and be a friend. When there is a time that pain arises you want to be the person they call.
 - Pray . . . I have numbers of non-Christians that I am praying for with whom I have shared. Paul prayed for doors to open to be able to witness, for people to respond to the gospel, that he would have boldness and that God would protect him.
 - Be prepared for the typical questions. There are only a few.
 - a. Why is there evil?
 - b. How can the Bible be true?
 - c. Is Christ the only way? What about sincere Muslims, Buddhists, etc.
 - d. Why must there be a hell?
 - e. What about those who have never heard?
 - f. Why are there so many hypocrites?
 - g. What about babies who die?

68. There is form and there is function. Function is a command of scripture. Form is usually the variables on how a culture does things.

A church’s function must dominate. Form merely accommodates function.

Function says, "we must." Form says, "we might."

Function is:

- teaching the word
- Evangelism
- Community – To love one another
- Discipleship
- Christian education, especially of the young
- Care for the weak, elderly and infirmed
- Communion
- Gracious financial giving
- Church discipline when needed
- Worship and singing
- Biblical leadership
- Missions

These are all non-negotiable absolutes of the church.

How these occur is form.

- What time do we meet?
- How do we do Sunday school?
- How do we do small groups – Sunday or during the week?
- How do you have communion? How often? Grape juice or wine?
- What kinds of music? Orchestra? Percussion? Choir?

Keeping these balanced is the art of navigating icebergs.

To be continued...

The Guy in the Tie
Reflections ... *continued*

69. I don't go to the back to shake hands after church. Not because I don't like people but because I do. I don't like to just shake hands with a cursory "howayuh." I really like to question people and dig into who they are. Shaking hands and saying hi to a thousand people is just too frustrating. People intrigue me and I want to know everything about them. I am, however, probably the only pastor of 4000 folk whom you can find in the phone book. I love to sit down over coffee and explore people but I don't like just chatting with anyone.

70. What does a pastor non-negotiably have to be? Have to do?

- Gifted: Studying and communicating must come easily. Your main function can't be laborious.
- Integrity: There can be no stain, no distance between what you know and how you live.
- Orthodoxy: The foundations of the faith of inerrancy – the Trinity, salvation, etc. . . the "pillars" must be in place.
- A virile meditative life: "When your output exceeds your intake your upkeep will be you downfall." Ministry is an overflow of personal devotion.
- Time to rest: The ministry can't become a job and wear a man down. 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. must be wisely protected and spent.
- The ability to delegate: As Moses in Exodus 18, he cannot try to do everything. You delegate your weakness.
- The ability to cast vision: Disciple making cannot be led by laymen. The vision and direction of the church must be led from the pulpit. He must inspire and lead, not threaten and whine.
- An enjoyment of people: Two kinds of pastors fail. Those always with men and never with God and those always with God and never with men.
- Prayerfulness: The success of ministry in the flesh is impossible. Men who don't learn to pray will lower their vision to the physically attainable.
- The ability to make hard decisions. Such as when discipline has to begin, when a firing must occur, or a line must be held, or when a man has to be no respecter of persons.
- Moral courage: It means to speak the truth in the face of a hostile and alien culture.
- Perseverance: A pastor who quits easily will quit early. He must have bulldog tenacity. He must believe in the importance of his message.

71. The church is no longer the home team. There was a day when no one would say that he was not a Christian. A proper American was a Christian. No longer. We are now the "scum of the earth, the dregs of all things." All of the prayers for the non-chalant American church to come to life are possibly about to be answered. Our testing may be beginning. Time to find out who's who. Time to purify ourselves of

the false and the nominal. Time for new heroes to arise. A time when women florists and male pizza deliverers rise to the top.

72. Integrity is one's consistency between what he says and what he does. "Integrate" means becoming one. An "integer" is one number. Integrity is the opposite of duality, of hypocrisy. Integrity is the major quality that men should be proud of.

When your ship goes down and you have something to save by lashing it to your body – that one thing is integrity.

"To thine own self be true."

73. People have asked me, "What are some movies that have something to say." Movies are without doubt right there with popular music (as opposed to classical) as the major art forms of our day. I'm not thinking of overt Christian movies or even "wholesome" movies but movies that are provocative in forcing ideas and values to be examined.

Rebel Without a Cause: Perhaps the first major teen movie that dealt with the angst of post WWII teens . . . i.e. Boomers . . . Look for what plagues Buzz, James, Natalie, and Sal Mineo. Look for the part the planetarium plays. Think through the name "Plato." Look at the three teens' imaginary family. Examine hard the opening scene and the mechanical monkey.

Mosquito Coast: An early Harrison Ford and River Phoenix. Watch two cultures – the sacred and the secular, the scientist and the missionary – try to subdue the wild and establish civilization. Look at the flaws of both. Who starts ahead? Who finishes last?

Cool Hand Luke: Paul Newman's best (in my opinion). It is the classic post-modern existentialist. Luke is the classic anti-Christ. One sees how the world views God and Christ and righteousness. It sets forth perfectly the anti-hero. Note the comparison of Lucius Jackson with Jesus. The comparison is so persistent that it brought criticism at its early showings. And examine "the man with no eyes." Watch the relationship of Luke and God. Also . . . watch close the opening parking meter scene that tips off the whole movie.

2010: The point won't be made until the last scene. I wanted to stand up and preach.

The Dark Crystal: What is "the new age" about? Again the theology is surprisingly revealed in the last scene. Totally erroneous but unmistakable. See how the modern thinks. Fun to watch even though the New Age is passe'.

Citizen Kane: A deliberate statement by Orson Wells. Once again watch the whole movie for the last minute. A profound biblical statement by a pretty unbiblical man. Wells saw where post WWII capitalism was going.

Judgment at Nuremberg: Maybe the most powerful acting on the most powerful subject by the greatest actors of all time. The movie makes the classic interpretation and judgment upon WWII and the transcendence of right and wrong.

Apt Pupil: The classic depiction of modern man's attraction to atheism but then terror once he truly encounters it. The movie is dark but a wakeup call for modern man.

West World: What happens when Western man has technology but no morality? Technology will turn on man and be his death knell.

74. Ionians

Sophists

Socrates

Plato

Aristotle

Stoics

Epicureans

Christianity...

Neo-Platonism

Augustine

Anselin

Abelard

Aquinas

William of Occam

Wycliffe

Luther

Calvin

Descartes

Spinoza

Liebnitz

Berkley

Locke

Hume

Kant

Goethe

Kierkegaard

Nietzsche

Herbert Spencer

Sartre

Pragmatism

Freud

The New Age or Cosmic Consciousness

If you will, google these or look them up in an encyclopedia and begin to see them in succession or continuity – how one philosophy then its failure leads to the next. You don't need to read them in depth but only in a cursory sense. If you do, you will know and understand the foundations of our present civilization. You will be more insightful than 99.99% of the rest of humankind. Truly intelligent. Take one a day. Three weeks. Get smart.

75. All mankind is looking for the premises of Christianity or the teachings of the Bible.
- Where did creation and its order come from? What is the nature of reality?
 - Where did man in all his uniqueness come about?
 - Where did evil originate and what is the nature of evil?
 - What is the solution to evil or the salvation from evil?
 - What is man's duty or ethical obligations?
 - How do we know any of these? What is the basis for knowing with certainty?
 - Where is history going? Is there a purpose to history?
 - Is man immortal? Does he have a soul? Is there life after death?

All of these questions are the major emphases of the Bible. Without the Bible or when there is a rejection of the Bible, man must find its substitute.

Without the Bible man is a lost sheep looking for a Bible. His brief seeming answers are called philosophy and the religions.

76. There is an ailment that if it infects a church can become fatal. It's called being "fortress minded." It's where a church no longer lifts its eyes to look upon the fields but builds a wall of protection to keep the world out. When separation from sin becomes isolation from sinners. When all a church's money and plans are for the comfort and benefits for those within the walls. All the benefits a church can have are OK if they don't become the focus and intent of the church. When a church is merely *our* building, *our* youth programs, *our* activity center, *our* playgrounds, *our* music programs, *our* AWANA programs, *our* VBS, and *our* retreats – then that church will become self-reliant, prayerless and committed to its comfort. It will rely on slick organization and control. Then it will become the kind of church the modern world makes fun of and SNL does skits about.

77. The first thing you'd better make sure your church does well is to take care of its babies, toddlers, and then pre-school. No matter how great everything else is, no parent will jeopardize his children. Where they are must be clean and safe and well-organized.

Next comes the youth and then all the rest.

78. The gay rights decision in July will be the most destructive act of government since Dred Scott and The Fugitive Slave Law, both which were reversed.

Though much or most of our country sees the present administration as progressive and courageous, Barack Obama will be the most destructive individual to date in the history of America. In time, one will not buy nor sell without bowing to the image of man. And this began in our day.

79. Ministry is keeping many plates spinning – the right plates. But the plate that will stop spinning, and quicker than all the rest, is that of discipleship, evangelism and missions. Because all involve the high price of the commitment of a life. The Great Commission must be taught and explained and exhorted and modeled in leadership. It cannot begin at the level of the layman – laymen will not go where the leadership will not lead. Discipleship and evangelism cannot be a mere staff position and budgetary item. It must be the integration point of all of the church. Meaning that there must be an inside track for those who want to run ahead of the pack. Discipleship must be that higher life and greater purpose of the church.

“Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.”

Mel and I made a decision early on that we would never have a person leave our church because they truly wanted to know the word to share it and disciple others but we wouldn't enable them. To the best of my knowledge we have never had that happen. People have left for numbers of reasons but never for that one.

80. Democracy is a mixed blessing. It indeed removes the historic failure of monarchies and dynasties. Of men and women, kings and queens who could only be removed by death or revolution of those who would compound their evil were there no restraint.

However, kings did not worry about popularity or job security and being re-elected. They could be committed to only doing right.

Democracy gave the people a say, a vote, and a sense of control. Evil could no longer be a runaway train. The population through checks and balances could inhibit the perceived undesirable. It would now be harder for an individual to have unhindered possibilities to advance their corruption.

However, “politicians” (the invention of democracy) would now be professionals whose only job security would be to please their constituency and to get re-elected. Principle would give way to utility. All of society now reflect the average. Courageous, unpopular stances would give way to the lowest common denominator of pleasing mediocrity and the average opinions. The people would indeed rule as they put *their* man in. Corruption would no longer be overt but covert, disguised, and secretive. Democracy appears to me to have the problem of removing the extremes of good and evil by insuring mediocrity.

81. Do you know what my prayer and dream is? My hope? For a great movement – spontaneous – beginning among Christian high school students who are tired of modernity. Tired of compromise. Tired of culture's trying to do the impossible – of finding a system of truth to replace Christianity. Tired of people saying there is no God nor final standard and then in the same breath moaning about the failure of the family, the absence of morals, of corrupt politicians, and the need for "law and order" – "right and wrong" – "righteous" leadership.

Kids who are tired of the whining about love after denying the Prince of Peace..

Kids who will say like the child in The Emperor's Clothes, "There's nothing there." Who will say, "All we've been told about no God and no creation and no final truth and no absolutes and no right and wrong – it's all a sham. And we reject it and return in covenantal devotion to the true God."

And then I think of this group as spreading outward from where they first gathered.

I think of them bonding together by blood oath to be pure, to study the Bible daily, to preach the gospel, and maintain obedience to scripture. To be knights of old – to "follow the Lamb wherever He goes and not love their own lives even unto death."

I see thousands of the young beginning to join arms and serve shoulder to shoulder. A Children's Crusade as in the Middle Ages. Youth inspired by no personalities or programs but by sheer discontent with the evil of their day.

Imagine.

82. Abraham Lincoln claimed that his best counsel was from his father Tom Lincoln, who said, "Every man must skin his own skunk." Whenever we have a skunk in our lives we someday are going to get stink all over us.

Best not to conceal a skunk.

83. Young pastors ask me if there is an art to preaching to which I respond. "Yes, Don't! Rather be an expert at examining a text and then clearly explaining its meaning with passion." When you do this you will let the Bible do its own work. The Bible is the most powerful and incendiary document that has ever existed. When it is explained you don't have to be clever. You just have to have the moral courage to communicate its revolutionary ideas.

84. But I do tell young pastors, or for that matter any communicator, male or female, that there are key points to remember in communicating.

- Don't try to teach a number of ideas but rather hammer in one nail. Don't give people too much to remember but rather a few ideas.

- Know how to flow from idea to idea or point to point. If not, your message will be jerky, staccato and non-cohesive. Think through how to proceed. Strive for clarity.
- Anticipate the mind of the listeners. What might they be thinking about what you are saying?
- Always let the text be the reference point. This is your credence. The Bible will testify for itself. The listeners should be able to easily follow your explanation of the text.
- Know where to strum and where to pluck. Strum the contributing points but pluck and accentuate the main ones.
- Keep a sense of time. You've got an allotted portion of time. Spend it wisely. Don't lose time on contributing thoughts. Spend it on main thoughts. Don't look up and only have five minutes to wrap up 20 minutes' worth of remaining text.
- Don't teach everything you know about every aspect of the text. Teach to the degree that each point needs, to clarify the main point.
- Don't cross reference excessively. Once you prove a point don't belabor it.
- Know how you will begin. Know cold your first two minutes. You need to appear that you are authoritative and know your subject as indeed you should. Don't meander, "hum and haw." Get to the point quickly.
- Don't "fiddle" with your hands. Such is an annoying tick. Let your hands rest on the pulpit or lectern. (When you travel to speak make certain they have a lectern.) Don't mess with your hair, your tie, your collar or cuffs. Don't scratch a zit or your nose. Don't mess with your notes or Bible marker. It will drive your listeners MAD.
- Let your eyes move naturally and normally. Don't stare at a spot on the ceiling. Naturally make eye contact.
- Try not to have "verbal ticks." Don't repetitively fill the silence with "um" or "ya know" or "and uh."
- Know how you will finish or know how you will land the plane. Don't circle the runway.
- Never assume you can tell a story. Even though it's a personal story, practice telling it.
- If you're funny, or worse if you think you are, don't drop a funny and wait for a laugh because if you don't get one you'll look stupid. Just move on as though you didn't intend to be funny. Then you appear brilliant, if it really is funny. If not you'll get a drum roll.
- Practice your message. Trusting God doesn't mean you get to be lazy. Be able to think through, very cleanly, each sequence of the message.
- "Don't juggle oranges, throw javelins." Speak with the authority of someone who believes what they're saying. Speak, don't chat.
- If there's any question about it, make certain your sound system will have no glitch. Nothing is more distracting than a continual sound problem.
- Make certain how long they want you to go. Then honor it.

The Guy and the Tie
Reflections *continued*

[Reflections 5]

85. What kind of person can “make disciples?”

- An intentional person: You don’t “happen” to make a disciple. You plan, pray, and purpose to make them.
- A person of eternal values: The world does not recognize nor applaud a disciple maker. They are an elite group. A church will have only a handful if it has any at all. A disciple maker has said goodbye to temporal glory and gain. They covet only the glory of God. And they also have . . .
- A love of people: The most wonderful thing one can do for another person is helping to rightly orient them to God and His word. (Incidentally “orient” means “the east.” To “re-orient” someone is to have them look east, back to the Holy Land. What could be better?)
- One with a virile personal devotional life: Discipleship is not just imparting a prepared curriculum or study guide. It is the imparting of a life. You must *have*, therefore, a life to impart. Prophets stand before god. Parrots merely repeat prophets.
- They identify the right “students”: They must be “FAT” – Faithful, Available, Teachable. Never let a person think he is doing you a favor. They must be hungry to learn and grow. If they are not willing to obey, their knowledge will make them eccentric or “off centered.” Knowledge is rather to make excellent.
- They can impart basic ideas: A disciple-maker doesn’t have to be brilliant but they do have to be basically sound. Basic doctrine. Basic life skills. Basic ministry skills. A learner . . . a liver . . . a leader.
- They must have a life than can be imitated. People learn more by observing than auditing. Paul said, “Be imitators of me as I imitate Christ.” (I Cor. 11:1)
- They must be able to inspire and motivate: This comes from getting a person to believe in the ability of God to use *them*. Nothing is more inspiring than having another *believe* in you.
- They must be able to reprove: This is never easy but at some point one will notice something that needs to be dealt with. There is a way to do it. And a willingness. This is what separates discipleship from merely instruction.
- They must have perseverance or bulldog tenacity: A disciple maker is going to have times of discouragement. Jesus’ disciples said, “Are there just a few being saved?” They asked this because there were so few who were “all in.” One who folds under discouragement at some time will seek a less demanding passion.

86. So how do you make a disciple?

- Start slow then raise the bar: Don’t make an open ended commitment. Simply say to a seeking person (and thus *must be* a seeking person), “Let’s spend six weeks together and I’ll show you some basic things and we’ll see how you like it.” During the six weeks you show them.
 - a. The Gospel
 - b. How to deal with sin

- c. Quiet times
- d. Prayer
- e. Values
- f. The Church

A hungry man will want to continue.

- After the six weeks, if he's faithful, ask him to think about continuing but say that the bar will be raised. Now he will have a quiet time every day. He also will have to attend church every Sunday. Say that you will meet for another 12 weeks.
- Now you begin studying the book of (say) Philippians for 12 weeks.
- If he is faithful then he will want to continue.
If so, say you will continue, but . . . – and then raise the bar.
 - He will need to go on a short term mission trip
 - and he will need to begin disciplining another believer
 - You may want him to begin a 2:7 group and to ace it . . .
 - or “you and I are going to go to a NAV conference in Colorado Springs”
- Make an effort to spend time with the person in everyday things to rub off onto his life.
- Introduce him to others who are disciple-makers so that he can see that others are committed to making their lives count.
- Introduce him to the great Christian authors and great Christian books.
- Let him recognize what his spiritual gift might be and talents he possesses.
- Challenge the person to a lifetime of serving God. Let him know that you believe in the Holy Spirit in him. Nothing motivates like someone who believes in who you are.
- Let the discipleship relationship mature into a mutual and deepening friendship. In time become peers.

Disciple making is a skill that one develops over a lifetime. It's worth it. It's the deepest sense of satisfaction of a life of eternal significance. An eternal God and eternal souls reconciled over God's eternal word.

It's so lofty that few can or will do it. But Jesus did.

87. Most jobs will make between 30 to 100 thousand dollars, depending on the skill or the demand (just my observation). To make significantly more than 100k will take either a rare ability – a surgeon let's say – or a great deal of responsibility like an owner of a business or a higher office in an organization.

But 30k to 100k or even higher gives you the same degree of comfort just with better toys and luxuries. But basically life is life.

For a person to make great amounts of money – millions – they are generally going to have a job with great responsibilities or a life of measured gambles – the stock market, and will demand a pretty good deal of pressures. If these are not present then one will have to use a different method for great wealth. They will

have to work 80 hours a week at something but then they will have to trade for a life of misplaced priorities and at this point the effect on marriages, children, and one's basic health and enjoyment of life are going to take their toll.

The best thing a person can do is to use their talent and try to do what they enjoy to make a living and be content with the hand they are dealt knowing that the differences between normal earnings and "enormous" earnings are really just going to be quantitative. To make more will always demand a price that seldom will be worth paying.

Make all you can with what you enjoy doing – knowing that *all* jobs bug you at some point, and don't complicate your lives by wanting what will not qualitatively change your life.

88. There are no more needful positions in the church than a funeral coordinator, a wedding coordinator, a minister of pastoral care, and one to schedule activities in the church – i.e. an events coordinator. You never see these people until you need them but without them your church will look like a Tijuana traffic jam and then the bloodletting will begin.

89. There has always been a tension within the Christian faith as to the nature of spirituality, or of the tension between the flesh and the spirit. There have always been systems of thought to deal with sin and temptation and promote the freedom of the Holy Spirit.

In the early church there seemed to be an innocent freedom from the Holy Spirit. As man turned from his lusts and followed the law of God written in his heart and mind – what the Puritans called unctio – and confessed his sin and repented when sin won out. As this was progressively and continually followed, this "walking in the Spirit," this not letting "sin reign in your mortal bodies so as to obey its lusts," then a progressive sanctification would occur.

But as things progressed, different systems less morally demanding, began to evolve.

The "sacraments" became physical ceremonies that took on, supposedly, the imparting of spiritual blessing. Thus sanctification took on a mechanical aspect of going through the physical motions to achieve spiritual favor with God. From this came the caricature of the Roman Catholic who could drink, party down and the like but could also go to mass, confess to a priest, do penance then move on. After the Reformation – which rejected the sacraments – spirituality became academic doctrinal purity. Calvinists arguing with Lutherans who argued against Arminians who argued with Baptists who argued with Anglicans – alas, the end product of the faith is not simply being doctrinally correct but spiritually faithful to God in all things.

By the 1800s there was a movement called the “Holiness Movement” whereby spirituality was an emotional experience whose emphasis was not a continual walk but a singular experience whose emotional reverberations continued through the years. John Wesley felt you would no longer sin.

As the Charismatic and Pentecostal positions progressed and evolved, spirituality became more and more an emotional, non-content experience with a stress on a non-understandable prayer language and the unconsciousness from being “slain in the spirit.” Spirituality was now purely super-reasonable.

On the other end of the spectrum was Protestant fundamentalism where often spirituality tended to be attendance at church events and a series of “don’ts.” Now one was spiritual by affiliation and performance.

Point: Man would love to have a “system” whereby he can control spirituality. If I can just do this, attend that, learn these, or experience that – then I can be spiritual. Alas, God does not make it that neat and accessible. All of these “systems” have one thing in common – you get to short-cut around the heart. God will not let that happen. The spirituality that God requires is one that submits to the holy law of God as prompted by the New Covenant in our heart, empowered by the Holy Spirit who “wills and works for His own pleasure.” A leading that matures as the Christian is “renewed in the spirit of his mind” by the cleansing of the word of God. A leading that dominates as the Christian “fights the good fight” and “buffets” his body to make it his slave and does not let “sin reign” in his mortal body to obey its lusts. Spirituality is a progressive work of God in one’s yielded heart and mind but it is never a slick technique no matter how much the church has longed for such.

90. If I have been guilty of anything of a repetitive nature it has been “laying on hands too quickly.” Good men and tragically flawed men may both be “unreadable” at the outset. It takes time to find out who a person really is whether male or female. Sometimes good men don’t initially reveal who they are. Bad guys make certain they don’t show their hand. But Jesus said, “You shall know them by their fruits.” Vines do not produce figs. Thorns do not produce grapes. A person’s heart will always show itself. But it will show itself over time. “You can’t tell a book . . .”

I have set myself up for disappointment a hundred times, but I’m learning.

91. If a church does not recognize the need for medical help for clinical depression and clinical anxiety it will find itself where it will only be able to care for limited problems – marriage problems, kid problems, in-law problems, anger and lust problems, money problems, etc. But on the issues of extreme chronic depression and anxiety it will have to admit defeat because it can’t deal with the physical medical symptoms. The patient will give up and then be forced to go to a psychiatrist. As a result the church will only be able to deal with Class B misdemeanors and the more difficult issues it will pass over.

Each church needs a volunteer in the church that has been through depression that they can send people to as well as biblical counseling. The Church also needs a volunteer doctor who is acquainted with depression and knows the ins and outs of medications. If needed the church may also need a reliable psychiatrist to refer people to. Psychiatrists don't primarily counsel but prescribe medications if needed. This way, the symptoms of depression can be dealt with, then the things that may have contributed to the cause.

Every church, I will assure you, has people struggling with depression but they don't feel like there is any help. Christians can be the last to seek help because they feel they will be morally judged for a non-moral area. A sympathetic ear is considered a Godsend.

92. No one – but no one – will live a tumult free life. A life free of unexpected disasters and catastrophes. “In pain you shall bring forth children.” (Gen. 3) “As sparks fly upward so man is born for trouble.” (Job) There is no human being who has ever lived who can dodge the fallenness of life. Even Jesus. Even Job. Peter. James. Mary. Joseph. Moses.

It's how you navigate the white water.
Not how you miss it.

93. The emperor Diocletian demanded that all Christians turn over their scriptures. Many pastors were willing to die before doing so. Many pastors, however, turned them over. The term “to hand over” is “traditore.” From it we get the term “traitor.” It came from a Christian leader willing to hand over his bible to the pagan.

Much the same thing has happened since, whenever this godless world has demanded we hand over our bibles for its amending to the world's ideas. Faithful pastors have said “no.” But some have turned traitor. It has produced . . .

Limited inerrancy
Theistic evolution
Neo-orthodoxy
Liberalism
Etcetera. Through the years, “hand it over”

Today the same traitorous act is happening in a much more subtle but more sinister way of concession.

- The same sex issue and
- The question of women pastors and women teaching men, or the egalitarian issue

Those who say “yes” to either say it on the basis that what the bible said when written cannot mean that now. But sexuality and gender roles are declared by creation. Neither are dispensational issues of the law to Israel.

So why do Christian leaders “traditore?” Because of the pressure of the world. Same as in Diocletian’s day.

The conclusions and repercussions of such reasoning’s produce doctrinal and theological and moral tidal waves. They treacherously remove inerrancy from the fabric of Holy Scripture and smuggle in the theological liberalism.

“It is written” becomes “it was written.”

Not me. Not us. Not ever.

94. Every Christian at some point will “fly by the panel.” Meaning that life will have them “socked in.” There will be no external bearings to guide by. Emotion will not be there. Common sense and reason will not guide you. Other people will not be able to counsel you. All you will resort to is correct theology and simple, naked trust in the sovereignty and providence of God. That Christian who has been neglectful of his or her bible will thrash until they retreat therein.
95. How does a pastor or a layman begin a discipleship program in a church that does not have one?
- Don’t start a new program with a bang from the pulpit. Christians are generally weary of new organizational programs. The church is program heavy but quality light.
 - Begin with one or two couples that hand pick their small groups with people they consider reasonably certain will go on to reproduce. Let the program begin quietly, low-key, underground. Try to begin it in those the church would consider leadership.
 - But if church leadership is not initially involved – which sadly enough can be the case – don’t start the small groups without pastoral OK. Otherwise the groups will be seen as a threat and divisive, almost subversive.
 - It is essential to choose a curriculum or study guide that will keep the groups on track and cohesive. It also puts the stress on the people’s involvement and faithfulness not on the leader’s teaching expertise. Remember that discipleship groups are not merely bible study groups. A discipleship group has a standard of faithfulness. Everyone must do the work. Memorize the verses. Be faithful in attendance and there is a time limit to the group with the expectation of reproducing and faithfulness. The coin of the realm is faithfulness not merely knowledge. The curriculum that we have used at Denton bible is the Navigator 2:7 program.
 - If you start with a couple of groups of handpicked people, the person or couple leading it needs to keep instilling in the group members the vision of reproducing. As the group approaches the nine-month graduation date the people in the group need to begin leading the group and they all need to start looking and recruiting their group of couples or singles they think will reproduce.

- If you began with two groups of four, the next generation will hypothetically be eight groups of four. That's 32 couples, 64 people. The next generation? You see now why multiplication is more strategic than addition.
- By the 2nd year a holy scuttlebutt will have begun in your church. People will be talking about the devotional life that is beginning in people's lives. At this point someone will need to be appointed (or hired) for the role of recruiting, publicizing, holding the standard, encouragement – someone with a passion for discipleship.
- For things to succeed like they should, the pastor and church leadership need to be onboard. People will seldom go where leadership does not. Discipleship must take on for the church what it was for Jesus, Peter, and Paul – everything.
- It will help at this point to bring in someone to preach on fruitfulness and reproducing so the congregation can see that discipleship is not a personal nuance but the too-often neglected “main thing” of Christianity. Something that others are aware of.
- Once you get into the 3rd generation of discipleship you should be able to begin “advertising” and asking for sign ups. The ideal scenario is for the pastor to cast the vision from the pulpit and for the leadership to be the foundational men in the discipleship groups.

96. Why don't most pastors not commit themselves to a foundational ecclesiology of disciple making? Some simply have no training or previous training. Those who do don't seem to do it for these reasons.

- Discipleship takes time to flourish. Churches don't want to wait. They want growth NOW to stay up with the competition.
- Discipleship creates a standard that exposes people.
- It also creates a new “coin of the realm” for leaders.
- A discipleship program may have to defy the pastor's elders or deacons.
- It doesn't generate quickly the increase of money.
- Discipleship is not the way to vertical denominational advancement.
- Discipleship makes a pastor surrender a degree of control.

97. Very few Christians understand the philosophic, theological, scientific, psychological dominoes that fell during the 20th century that brought about the present moral breakdown in American and all Western civilization. Christians understand why they don't have philosophic or theological problems. Not why the culture does.

- They need to understand the nature of a world view.
- Why it determines culture.
- What America's worldview was through the mid to late 1800s and how and why it changed.
- Theism to Deism to Naturalism to existentialism.
- One can merely teach through The Universe Next Door by James Sires to get a foundation. But since the 60s there have been written a multitude of books on this subject.

- The new generations are being born into this culture. They above all must be made to think critically.
- A modern pastor must be able to understand and communicate the sequence of history's worldviews.

98. There are times that one philosopher calls "weightless." Nietzsche would call them "eternal nows." Things and times that have no sense of time, no cause-effect, no purpose, but are simply pristine moments of perfect delight. They slip up on you and take you unawares and you don't realize them until they are passed. They are moments that you would keep forever if possible – "eternal nows." They are soap bubbles. Shining prisms. Here. Gone.

For me it is a Christmas Eve or an evening prior. Dark nights. Cold. A fire. Quiet. An open bible and a text come alive, after a few hours of boys and grandkids and unfettered laughter and unashamed spoiling.

And now it is quiet. The TV is on a music channel that plays "Sounds of the Seasons," Christmas carols. Christmas Eve services are past, full of praise and delight and robust fellowship. Pumpkin pie. Cool Whip. Dark roast coffee. Bible intermingles with a good, anticipated chapter of an anticipated book. Nothing of tomorrow to distract or trouble.

Weightless gleaning of truth that whispers to you and chuckles within you with the notion that you have no concept of the eternal tomorrow that awaits.

Someone winks beneath the page and smiles. The lap on which you sit whispers "ABIDE."

99. So many fundamentalists can have a burr in their saddle over the celebration of Christmas, Easter and Trick or Treating. But in 40 plus years we have not seen one single person, incident, or church situation because of the evil influence of Santa, the Easter Bunny, or Halloweenishness. I have had problems, however, in counseling children of said "non fun" fundys who abandoned the spoil sport faith of their harsh parents for a bitter and defiant life of immorality, drugs, alcohol and violence. Just an observation.
100. Not "quenching the Spirit" means that you can't always organize or control or predict what God will do. Any church program or church leadership must hold onto their hopes with a loose hand. Sometimes God will go beyond your box. A pastor must say with Peter, "Who am I to stand in God's way?" (Acts 11:17)
101. This present generation, I fear, has lost the sense of the local church. Of belonging. Of having expectations and responsibilities that will curtail the passion for total freedom to do what I want. But a "person" demands to be in relationships. Deep ones. The younger generation loves to be independent and free. But such will know no greatness. Only the vapidness of self-gratification.

102. When a congregant comes to me or the elders with an “I’ve got a bone to pick with you” attitude, I will resist him, oppose him and best him because he has disrespected my position. No matter how just his cause I must oppose him because to accede means to agree with a possible bad guy. If someone is congenial I almost have to yield because to oppose would be to thwart a good man.

“By forbearance is a ruler persuaded.” (Proverbs)

103. I have become through the years a firm believer in the doctrine of the “loser.” This is a person who finds his meaning in failure. He knows that if he has to observe the same excellence as the rest of mankind that he will fail because he has no character, discipline nor courage. What he can do, however, is to run the opposite way. As a matter of fact he will make an effort to corrupt his way because his ineptness is seen as his own unique personality trait. To fail is to be.

The Guy in the Tie Epilogue

Paul Bear Bryant’s wife said that there were two times that she cried after Bear Bryant took the A&M job. One was when she came to College Station and one when she left. So it is with me and Denton. You can get strangely attached to a place.

When I first heard of Denton it was about parties, drugs, jazz and basketball. And North Texas State University.

I cried when I came here. For three years all I could think about was leaving. How little I understood what God would do. “How unfathomable are His ways.” I would cry if I left.

Sometimes I drive by and look at the three churches built from ’81 to 2006. I marvel at how it began from a prayer meeting, a little girl’s death, and the aftermath of liberalism in three other churches.

God simply had something he wanted done.

My brother is buried here. My wife will be. I will be also. The essence of my life has been spent here. My heart has been poured out in this city that first broke my heart then gave it back. Denton Bible got my best. Years 26 to 65.

I had no idea.

And I’ve learned something. The reason old men and old women get crabby and cynical is because when you get old you have begun to see through the illusion of life. The life that the system markets. The life that the world says, “this is life.” The Super Bowl or World Series is the biggest game ever only to be played again starting in 8 months.

The country will throw a party every four years as candidates promise a new era.

The red carpet will roll out for the botoxed and implanted, sucked and lifted, who pose for the thousand supermarket rags that young girls and old men dream over.

All will compete for their 15 minutes. New Arabs will kill new Jews. New Irish will hate new Brits.

For the old guys “the thrill is gone.” They’ve seen behind the curtain. The strong inspire the young who are scorned by the old because they’ve seen the wheel turn 50 times.

I’m now part of the cynics.

“The glory of young men is their strength.
The glory of old men is their wisdom.” Proverbs 20:29

Getting old is freeing. You find yourself saying more often, “Again?!” “Move on!” “Get on with it!” “Here we go.”

Money, luxury, beauty, brains, strength, status all begin to find their proper level. And character, fidelity, loyalty, duty, truth, love, kindness, diligence, and wisdom burn brighter and brighter in a world that begins to flicker.

The **worst** thing is to too late exclaim, “Damn. I played the fool.”

The deepest satisfaction is to realize “I picked the winner.” A life spent for the right cause – “the truths of God set forth in His word fulfilled in His Son enabled by Grace.”

So that’s me, beginning till now.

“My God, Woodrow. It has been quite a party, ain't it?”

~ Tommy Nelson