

## A HOPEFUL JOURNEY

Lee Roy Martin<sup>1</sup>

### The Value of Testimony

*Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,  
whom he has redeemed from the hand of the adversary* (Ps. 107.2).

Every Wednesday night at the Cumming Church of God we shared our testimonies of God's work in our lives. This witness was not considered optional. When I first came into the Pentecostal church (or 'Holiness church' as it was more commonly called in my early experience), I was immediately taught the benefit of testimony – believers are made overcomers 'by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony' (Rev. 12.11). I was taught also that if we fail to testify when given the opportunity, we are acting in disobedience to the Scriptural command, 'Let the redeemed of the Lord say so' (Ps. 107.2). Furthermore, in light of the fact that those who are full of the Spirit have 'holy boldness' (Acts 4.13, 29, 31), any fear of testifying indicates that we need to pray for our baptism in the Holy Spirit or for a 'refilling'. I am grateful, therefore, for this opportunity to offer a brief testimony of my redemption in Christ and my calling to be a Pentecostal scholar.

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## **Born Out of Place**

*They wandered in the wilderness on a desolate path;*

*They could find no city to dwell in.*

*Hungry and thirsty, they were nearly exhausted (Ps. 107.4-5).*

It is obvious to me now that God created me for the ministry of scholarship and teaching. My calling, however, was not always so clear in my mind; and I realize that, much like Israel in the wilderness, I needed a great deal of preparation before I would be ready to fulfill the calling to which God was moving me. In fact, until I was eighteen years of age I had no idea what direction my life should take. I wandered about with no path marked before me. Even after God called me to the ministry, my view of the future was clouded with uncertainty. I prayed for guidance as to whether I should be a pastor, a missionary, or an evangelist (the categories of teacher and scholar did not enter my mind as they were not aggressive enough to match the urgent needs of the last days). Before settling down at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary, I journeyed as a pastor through many communities, cities, and states. In our first fourteen years of pastoral ministry, Karen (my wife) and I moved nine times.

My wandering, however, started before my birth. I was born out of place, away from home, and in strange surroundings. My parents and all of my grandparents lived in northern Georgia, but I was born in Texas (a desolate country in comparison to Georgia). My father had been drafted to serve in the army during the Korean war, and while he was in Korea, his young pregnant wife waited for him at Fort Hood in Killeen, Texas. There in the army hospital, far from friends and family, alone and afraid, my eighteen-year-old mother gave birth to me on a Sunday morning in January, 1955. We were alone in the world and feeling very much in exile.

## **Away Down South**

*[The Lord] delivered them from their distresses,*

*And he led them forth on a straight path*

*That they might go to a city to dwell in (Ps. 107.7).*

Upon my father's discharge from the Army, we returned to Georgia, where I remained until I left home to attend Lee College (now Lee University). We lived in the Friendship community, a rural area of Northern Georgia between the small towns of Canton and Cumming. It was a monolithic community where everyone held to the same worldview. We were white; we were Baptists; and we were conservatives. We loved Franklin Roosevelt and hated Communism. Sadly, Forsyth County had become all white as a result of the racial cleansing that began in 1912 when African-Americans were advised to leave the county or suffer violence. Throughout the twentieth century, the people in power allowed it to be known that African-Americans should not even attempt to pass through the county, much less settle there. My first conversation with an African-American occurred when I was sixteen and our high school soccer team had stopped off at a McDonald's in Atlanta. An African-American man standing beside me looked at our school bus and asked, 'You from Forsyth County?' 'Yes', I replied. 'I'll never go there again', he said; 'I drove through there last month and by the time I got out of the county my truck was shot through with holes'. Shaking my head, I apologized, 'I'm sorry; I hope you won't hold it against me'. Thankfully, my parents sheltered me from racist influences and never engaged in bigoted talk.

Like most everyone else in the community, my grandparents were hard working people who had grown up on the farm. They exemplified the Southern ethos, with its hospitality, conservative morality, and Christian underpinnings. My maternal grandfather, Roy Sanders (from whom I received my middle name), managed a chicken farm with four or five chicken houses, each one housing 3,000 to 5,000 chickens as they grew from chicks to young 'broilers'. It was later converted to an egg producing operation. Pop Sanders was an interesting man. Three of his fingers had been partially cut off in a sawmill accident. He enjoyed catching infant squirrels and raising them as pets, but they always grew wild when they reached adulthood. For a broken leg, he constructed his own cast out of sticks and mud. He trained his parakeet to whistle at passing women.

I always loved visiting with Pop Sanders and his second wife, Lillie Mae, who were young enough to be active and attentive to the grandchildren. Our cousins might also be there, and we would en-

gage in great exploits together. Sometimes, Pop Sanders would take us fishing in the daytime and in the evening we would watch 'Gun-smoke' or 'Bonanza' on the TV. Lillie Mae was a kind woman and a great cook, who reminded me of Aunt Bea from 'The Andy Griffith Show' (though a bit quieter). She had a green thumb and grew many flowers and potted plants.

I was told that my maternal grandmother, Lucille Ingram Sanders, had suffered a 'nervous breakdown' and had abandoned her family when my mother was a small child. I regret that I was unable to know her. I remember seeing her four times, twice at my house and twice at her house after she had remarried. When I was small, she gave me a pair of shorts that I refused to wear; and when I was about twelve years old she gave me a chess set, which I enjoyed immensely (She mistakenly thought she was giving me checkers, which she called 'checks').

Although my maternal grandparents considered themselves to be Christians, they rarely attended church, and did not outwardly practice religion. My paternal grandparents, however, were more devoted to church life. My father's father, Landrum Duffy Martin, whom I called 'Papaw' and others called 'Duffy', was a Baptist preacher. He had at one time pastored the small community church that we attended – Friendship Baptist. By the time I was old enough to know him, he had already suffered a stroke and was very sickly. In my memory I can see him walking around the yard with his cane, while he sang the old gospel song, 'I Feel Like Traveling On'. I also remember that he offered thanks before every meal, a ritual that we did not practice at home and which I rarely witnessed elsewhere. Because of a series of strokes and heart attacks, Papaw's health deteriorated rapidly. His 'nerves' would bother him whenever the grandchildren became too loud, so we were often told to go outside and play.

My paternal grandmother, Mary Belle Sosebee Martin, was a cheerful, optimistic, and energetic woman, though in my eyes she was old. She did eventually become very old, living to the age of one hundred five. Memaw, as I called her, always had a smile on her face, and she laughed frequently. I loved her fried chicken, biscuits, green beans, and mashed potatoes. She encouraged me at every opportunity and made it known that she was proud of my becoming a preacher.

When Memaw was in her 90's, she told me a story from her childhood. She lowered her voice to little more than a whisper and said, 'I want to tell you something that I have not told anyone. You know that our church didn't believe in miracles like your church does. But when I was just a little girl, my mother became very sick. The doctor gathered the family together and told us that mama would not live. We were all so sad and crying. I did not want to lose my mother, so I went in and knelt down beside my mother's bed, and I prayed. I told God that I had read about miracles in the Bible, and I asked him to perform a miracle and heal my mother. The next day, my mother got up out of the bed, and her sickness passed. I just wanted to tell you about it'.

My father, Franklin Duffy Martin, was a tall, slim man with black hair. He was taciturn and introverted, but he knew how to be social when necessary. He was faithful to his obligations and to his family. Farming was his passion, but our little farm could not provide for all our needs. Therefore, he was employed 8 to 5 at a pants factory, and he worked our small farm on the side. He was too absorbed in his own pursuits to provide guidance and direction to his children, but I learned quite a lot by observation as we plowed the fields, planted fruit trees, built fences, raised livestock, and added rooms to the old farm house.

As might be expected, my mother was the most powerful influence in my early life. Lara Lee Sanders Martin (from whom I received my first name) is the only one of my ancestors who is living today. She is an outgoing, enthusiastic, and cheerful optimist. She cares deeply about everyone around her, and she is willing to demonstrate that care through her actions. I remember her seeking out extra employment in the weeks before Christmas so that she would have money to buy our gifts (I remember receiving over the years a very nice football, a slot car race track, a Timex watch, and a telescope with which I viewed the solar eclipse March 7, 1970).

My mother is a very creative and inventive person, always trying something new and changing old patterns. Back on the farm, when everyone else was growing mundane crops like beans and corn, she decided to plant asparagus and broccoli. Other people go to Wal-Mart to purchase their yarn, but she has raised sheep and made her own yarn. She milks goats and makes goat cheese. She produces

homemade soap, and she built an outdoor mud oven in which to cook bread and pizza.

With broad interests that include art, music, and drama, she has acted in community theatre, and she has written and illustrated three children's books. Her singing and storytelling kept us children occupied and entertained constantly. She routinely addressed life situations with proverbial sayings, such as, 'Don't cry over spilt milk', 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush', 'Curiosity killed the cat', 'A stitch in time saves nine', and 'Don't count your chickens before they are hatched'.

I gained from my mother a fundamental inquisitiveness, a passion for knowledge, and an enthusiasm for living. Like my mother, I enjoy devoting myself fully to every endeavor. For us, nothing is done halfheartedly or perfunctorily.

I also received from my mother a love of art, music, and literature. She bought a set of record albums with the twenty-five greatest works of classical music, and she played them over and over for us to hear. Furthermore, she was my first and best teacher, the person in whom I witnessed most clearly the joy of discovery and the joy of helping others make their own discoveries.

My brothers and sisters have also taught me much over the years. My brother, Darryl, and I roamed the woods in search of adventure (always accompanied by our dogs). Each spring we would build a dam on a small creek, thus fashioning a swimming hole. However, the rocks and mud would be washed away in the first big rain storm. I always admired Darryl's determination. He was able to marshal the discipline necessary to overcome whatever obstacle stood before him. Darryl and I were once given the task of cutting down a large oak tree. We stood in the snow and pulled back and forth on a crosscut saw for two days before we cut through the trunk of that big oak tree.

My sisters, Angela and Mary, were several years younger than I; therefore, I did not spend as much time with them as I did with Darryl. I can only hope that I served as a positive influence upon my little sisters. In our adult years, I have enjoyed every moment that we have spent together during holidays, family reunions, and special occasions. All three of my siblings are now happily married, a fact that gives me great joy.

Growing up on a small farm means that I have memories of plowing with a mule (and later with a tractor), drawing water out of a hand-dug well, milking the cow, feeding the hogs, gathering eggs, dressing chickens, chasing possums, birthing pigs, shucking corn, picking strawberries and blackberries, eating apples and peaches fresh from the tree, cutting firewood, making slingshots, and learning all things having to do with the outdoors. I learned that seasons come and go. Both plants and animals live, grow, and die.

We experienced several years of weather so cold that the lakes froze over. One January night, a little pig's tail froze and fell off. We lived in an old house with only a single wood heater. The cracks in wall made the house so cold and drafty that we sometimes wore our coats inside the house. One night, the water in a glass beside my bed froze. During a snow storm, snow blew in through a crack in the front door and made a small pile on the living room floor.

What we grew we ate – corn, beans, peas, and tomatoes. One year we grew a large crop of sweet potatoes. That winter we had them in boxes in the corner, in the closet, and under the beds. We ate sweet potatoes every day and in every form imaginable. When I left home, I never wanted to see another sweet potato (or bowl of pinto beans and corn bread either for that matter).

Growing up in the country taught me to be self-reliant and innovative. It taught me how to take whatever is available and make it work. It taught me an appreciation and respect for nature, the environment, natural resources, and animals. Living on the farm with my father, my mother, one brother, and two sisters taught me how to be part of a structure in which everyone has responsibilities and contributes to the benefit of the whole.

## School Daze

*Their hearts were bowed down with labor;  
They stumbled, and there was none to help* (Ps. 107.12).

Perhaps one of the reasons that I never considered becoming a teacher is that my first year in school was very traumatic. It was not that I found the curriculum to be too challenging. On the contrary, my mother had already taught me to read, write, add, and subtract. I was well prepared, and school was easy. In fact, I was so far ahead

of the other students that the teacher appointed me as tutor to the slow learners (my first teaching assignment). Academics was not the problem; the problem was the combination of my own emotional immaturity and my teacher's stern approach. I was so terrified of being away from home that I became physically ill every day. On a few occasions, I was allowed to go home early, and for a short time I was given medication – 'nerve pills'. My father suffered from an anxiety disorder, and perhaps I inherited a bit of it myself. At the least, I was extremely shy and introverted. My fears could have been quieted by a caring, motherly teacher; but my first grade teacher was an austere woman who offered me little sympathy. I have never been incarcerated, but first grade seemed like prison to me. Once the door was shut each day, I felt abandoned and hopeless. Eventually, however, the anxiety attacks became briefer and less severe.

Outside of school my mother continued to encourage my intellectual development – she purchased a new set of the World Book Encyclopedia. I began reading through it while in the second grade, and, to the disdain of my teacher, I often brought my discoveries to class. Once I was telling about the extinct Dodo bird, and she exclaimed, "There was no such thing as a Dodo bird", and she swatted my hand several times with her wooden paddle. This and many similar events provoked a deep distrust of authority figures.

By the fourth grade, when I was encouraged by my teacher, Mrs. Groover, reading had become a daily occupation and a genuine passion for me. My natural thirst for knowledge was fueled by biographies of great personages such as Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington Carver. I could enter great adventures in far away lands through novels such as *The Golden Impala*,<sup>2</sup> and *Tarzan of the Apes*.<sup>3</sup> By the sixth grade I was reading sometimes ten books in a week. I would read one book at school after I finished all my work; then I would take another book home and read it that night. I was disappointed when it took me three days to read *David Copperfield*.<sup>4</sup> My sixth grade achievement test placed me at an eleventh grade reading level, and, consequently, I

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<sup>2</sup> Pamela Ropner, *The Golden Impala* (New York: Criterion Books, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote twenty-six Tarzan books, each over two hundred pages, and I read every one of them.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (New York: The Modern Library, 1934), 923 pages.

skipped the seventh grade and went straight to the eighth. Eighth grade was a bit of a challenge, but still I scored the highest grades in the class.

## Awakening

*He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death,  
And he broke apart their bonds* (Ps. 107.14).

As a child, I gave little thought to God. Of course, I knew about God. Every school day began with a Bible reading and the Lord's Prayer, and I often attended Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. But the sermons seemed incomprehensible, and the hymns were meaningless. During worship services I preferred to sit on the back row and carve my initials into the pew in front of me. Then, when I was nine years old, everything changed suddenly.

Our church, Friendship Baptist, held a week-long revival meeting in August of each year, with a service in the morning and another in the evening. The evening services were a popular community event and were well-attended, while the morning services consisted mostly of women and children. The weather was hot, and the church was not air conditioned; therefore, we opened the windows and hoped for a breeze. We also utilized cardboard fans that featured a picture of Jesus on the front and an advertisement for Ingram funeral home on the back.

On the first evening of the revival, my family was sitting on the second pew of the small church. I have no recollection of the preacher or the sermon, but during the invitation I began to weep. I did not know why I was weeping, and, being a very private person, I was embarrassed to be weeping in public. I was especially embarrassed when a minister came over to me and asked, 'Are you lost?' I had no idea what he was talking about. He continued, 'Do you want to be saved?' The terms 'lost' and 'saved' made no sense to me. I do not remember my answer, but they led me out of my seat and over to the center pews where people were kneeling to pray. As I knelt with my face down in the pew, my grandfather came over and exhorted me, 'Just believe and confess'. Then he asked, 'Do you believe that Jesus died for your sins?' As I continued to weep, I responded weakly, 'I don't know'. Others came over to help me.

They asked me the same questions, and I kept on saying, 'I don't know'. After half an hour or so, the service ended, and I had not made a confession of faith.

The next day we returned for the morning service (absent my father, who was at work), and the same scenario played out again. The third day of the revival came, and again I cried with my face in the pew, with people asking, 'Do you believe that Jesus died for your sins?' Once again, I mumbled through my tears, 'I don't know'. After a long, I saw in my mind a vision of Jesus as he hung on the cross, and I could hear him say, 'I did this for you'. As I viewed the scene in my mind, I said to Jesus, 'Yes, I believe'.

Oddly, I did not sense an immediate relief from the heaviness that had rested upon me. Perhaps I was so emotionally spent from the three days of struggle that I was a bit numb. As soon as I awoke the next day, however, I knew that everything had changed. My first thought was that I loved God and wanted to go to church and worship him. I had been changed.

Once my parents learned of my conversion, they informed the pastor, and I was baptized and joined the church. My conversion was a radical transformation of my heart. Before, the hymns were uninteresting to me, but now, I was eager to learn every song and sing praises to God. Songs that were previously meaningless were now deeply significant. They were the voicing of my newly created Godward affections. I began to pray for my friends who were not Christians, and I even daydreamed about someday preaching the message that had changed my life so dramatically. My new birth was a transformation of my affections, an awakening of my spirit to communion with God. Jesus had saved me.

### **For Love of the Game<sup>5</sup>**

*He turns the desert into a pool of water,  
And the dry ground into springs of water (Ps. 107.35).*

At the age of twelve, I entered the first day of Little League tryouts with small expectations. I had not played baseball the previous year, choosing instead to spend the summer in the Boy Scouts. Two

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<sup>5</sup> Title of the motion picture, *For Love of the Game* (directed by Sam Raimi; Los Angeles: Universal Studios, 1999).

years earlier, I had barely made the team. The coach, J.W. Holbrook, lined us up at home plate and ordered us to race to center field and back. Winning the race easily, I was astonished to find that I was the fastest player on the field. Batting practice revealed similar, surprising results. I hit one pitch after another out of the park as the whole team gathered in left field and beyond to catch my home runs. Apparently, my hard winter of cutting firewood and clearing brush had produced more than just the callouses on my hands. That year, I hit a home run in every game except one, and I won every game in which I pitched. Our team won the county championship, and several of us were chosen for the all-star team, hoping to reach the Little League World Series. We won several games in the tournament, but finally we faltered and were eliminated. We consoled ourselves with the knowledge that we had advanced farther than any previous team from Forsyth County. For the next few years, I never tired of playing baseball. It became my second consuming passion (in addition to reading). I continue to play every year, through Little League, Pony League, Senior League, and high school.

Jesus saved me, but baseball helped. Baseball was to me an oasis in the desert land of adolescence. I was loved and affirmed at home, but at school I felt uneasy and self-conscious. I was the shy, socially awkward, smart kid who did not always fit in. Baseball turned me into a normal kid, and the team became my community, giving me a sense of belonging. Moreover, as I grew into my teen years, baseball kept me occupied and out of trouble.

Even though baseball is just a game, it demands discipline and long hours of practice. I learned to do my best at all times, to persevere in the face of setbacks, and to 'leave it all on the field'. In the movie, *For Love of the Game*, Kevin Costner plays the role of forty-year-old major league pitcher, Billy Chapel, who is pitching the last game of his long career. His catcher, Gus, warning the pitcher not to exhaust himself too quickly, advises Chapel, 'Chap, don't throw it away too early'. But the aging pitcher, wanting to give his very best effort and go out strong, says to his catcher, 'Today I'm throwing hard, Gus'.<sup>6</sup> Like Billy Chapel, I no longer have the stami-

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<sup>6</sup> Billy Chapel and Gus Sinski in *For Love of the Game*.

na of a young man, but I am trying to throw hard until my last pitch.

## **Welcome to Pentecost**

*Let them exalt him in the congregation of the people,  
And let them praise him in the assembly of the elders (Ps. 107.32).*

My academic success continued through high school where I placed second in the Governor's Honors Program and received an award in the eleventh grade for the highest score on the PSAT. My studies focused heavily on math and science, which helped me to score above the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile on both the SAT and ACT.

In our senior year of high school, my best friend and I joined the Future Teachers of America, not because either one of us hoped to become teachers, but because the membership consisted of thirty girls and no boys. It never occurred to me that I possessed both the gifts and the disposition to be a teacher. Even my frequent tutoring of other students did not give me a clue. My love of the outdoors caused me to look into the careers with the National Park Service. I was intrigued by the mysteries of the deep, and I considered studying marine biology. My aptitude for math coupled with my interest in astronomy made me lean toward the newly formed NASA as a future career path.

Little did I know that God was about to set me on a new path that would eventually bring me to where I am today. Just as he did when I was converted at the age of nine, God appeared when I least expected him.

Our senior English course was taught by a young woman who enjoyed creative assignments, and one of those assignments required us to work together in teams to produce an essay on a topic of contemporary interest. I was joined with Brinkley Goodson, the son of a local pharmacist. Brinkley was known to be rebellious and full of teenage angst – given to cigarettes, drinking, fighting, and smoking pot. I never socialized with him and had rarely even spoken to him. Reluctantly and apprehensively I met with him to talk about our project and soon learned, to my amazement, that he was friendly and easy to work with.

We took a ride in his car, and he proceeded to tell me that God had recently changed his life when he accepted Christ in a revival service at the Cumming Church of God. He then looked over at me and asked, ‘Do you know Jesus?’ The truth is that in the seven years since my conversion, my family had stopped attending church; I had drifted away from God, and I had lost my ‘first love’ (Rev. 2.4). I had starting to seek my teenage independence, and I was developing new interests (with names like Angie, Karen, and Patty).

Recalling my experience in the Baptist Church, I replied to Brinkley’s question in the affirmative and explained that I had received Christ and was a church member. My answer would have satisfied anyone from within the typical religious community, but in light of Brinkley’s affiliation with the Church of God (which was anything but typical), he pressed for more information, ‘Have you been baptized in the Holy Ghost?’ I was puzzled and answered, ‘What is the Holy Ghost?’ At that point, he presented the case for Spirit baptism, leading me through several biblical passages in support of the doctrine. I reiterated the fact that I had not been taught about the Holy Ghost. He continued, ‘Did they teach you about the second coming of Jesus?’ I answered, ‘No, I haven’t heard anything about that either’. Brinkley then shared several scriptures regarding the return of Jesus. He invited me to a revival that was going on at the Church of God. I was soon a regular attender, and within a year I had experienced sanctification and had been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The Cumming Church of God was known locally for its external ‘holiness’ teachings – no jewelry, no makeup, and no worldly amusements. Unfortunately, the church’s legalistic stance made it appear bizarre to some people. I soon learned, however, that underneath the external restrictions was a deep spiritual freedom that enthralled me and eventually liberated me. Although the church was best known for what it stood against, I was captivated by what it stood for. It advocated a fully formed Pentecostal spirituality that exemplified what Steve Land has called ‘a passion for the kingdom’.<sup>7</sup> The joyful singing, exuberant shouting, and unrestrained prayer were evidence of the manifest presence of God. In every worship service we prayed at the altar; we invited sinners to be

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. the subtitle of Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), p. 2 and *passim*.

saved; we prayed for the sick; and we prayed for people to be baptized in the Holy Ghost. In every service we were reminded, 'Jesus is coming soon' and he is coming for a church that is sanctified. Revivals were frequent, and it seemed like I was in church almost every night.

The pastor of the Cumming Church of God, Rev. Dewey F. Miller, was a positive role model for me and always available. My life and ministry was also influenced by two outstanding women ministers – Rev. Chloe Miller (wife of the pastor) and Rev. Mae Terry. Sister Terry had planted several churches in Georgia (including the Cumming church) and was well-known as an evangelist. Both of these women loved the young people in the church, and they devoted themselves to mentoring us in the areas of Bible study, prayer, and preaching.

In 1970 the Pentecostal church occupied a relatively insignificant position on the religious landscape. Pentecostal theology and practice had not yet influenced the church world to the degree that we witness today. At that time, most non-Pentecostals considered speaking in tongues to be aberrant behavior (or demonic). The belief in miracles was not commonplace. Prayer for the sick was practiced only in Pentecostal churches. Praise and worship music was unheard of. Non-Pentecostal churches did not offer 'contemporary' worship services, and Pentecostals were not yet on television – in fact, there were no Christian TV networks at all. Furthermore, Christian denominations (including Church of God) were more monolithic than they are now, and both ministers and laity were more devoted to their denominations. The consumerist approach had not yet come to dominate the church world.

Looking back on my first conversation with Brinkley Goodson, I am struck by his ability to communicate the Fivefold Gospel after having been a Christian for only a few months. His facility in the scriptures is evidence of that church's commitment to discipleship and to Pentecostal doctrine. New believers were expected to learn biblical teachings and follow Jesus wholeheartedly. For most of the members, church attendance was not just a religious duty to be added to their schedule of diverse activities. The church was more than a peripheral element in their otherwise secular lives. Instead, the church was central to their lives, the locus of their primary ex-

perience of community. It was in this quintessential Pentecostal church that I was formed as a Pentecostal believer and minister.

### **Ramblin' Wreck<sup>8</sup>**

*They cry out to the Lord in their trouble,  
And he brings them out of their distresses* (Ps. 107.28).

Graduation from high school gave me little consolation because at that point I was forced to make decisions about my future, but I could not decide what I should do with my life. My love for the Lord and my involvement in the Church of God motivated me to attend Lee College, but I had received an academic scholarship to attend Georgia Tech, a highly regarded university in Atlanta. My school counselor convinced me that I should give Georgia Tech a try for at least one year. At Tech I learned a little about some things, and I learned a lot about other things. I learned a little about calculus, architecture, and American literature. I learned a lot about the world that I had read about but had never experienced. For the first time in my life, my worldview was challenged by teachers who scoffed at religion and who ridiculed anyone who believed in God. I learned a little from those professors; mostly, I learned from them that I needed more theological education.

My most valuable lessons, however, came through interaction with other students. For the first time in my life, I engaged in conversation with people who were different from me. Down the hallway in my dorm I met Chinese, Pakistani, African-American, Jewish, and Roman Catholic students. I asked them about their lives and their cultures. We watched the Vietnam War on the TV, and played football behind the dorm. I learned that reading about other cultures is one thing, but living across the hall from an orthodox Jew is something else entirely. A few of the boys loved to drink,<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'Ramblin' Wreck' refers to Georgia Tech students and alumni. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, engineers from Georgia Tech constructed makeshift vehicles in the jungles of South America. The vehicles and the engineers who made them came to be known as 'Rambling Wrecks from Georgia Tech'.

<sup>9</sup> Drinking is an honored tradition at Ga. Tech, where the school's fight song includes the words, 'Like all the jolly good fellows, I drink my whiskey clear'. My avoidance of alcohol offended a few of my fellow students, though one of them begged me to pray for him when he became violently ill from overdrinking.

especially on weekends when I would sometimes have to step over bodies lying on the floor in the hallway. One of the worst drinkers was a Pentecostal Holiness lad who was sowing his wild oats. The only other Pentecostal student that I met at Georgia Tech was a red-headed Assembly of God boy. He rarely left his room, but kept himself in studious seclusion. Unlike him, I attempted to participate in dorm life and at the same time be a witness for Christ, but I never felt very successful in my attempts. I was only seventeen years of age and very immature.

## **Called to Preach**

*He sent his word and healed them  
And he saved them out of their distresses* (Ps. 107.20).

While attending Georgia Tech, I would drive home on the weekends, work on Saturday, and attend the Church of God on Sunday. During a revival service in the spring, I received from the Lord a very clear call to ministry. The altar was full of people who were praying fervently. Many of the seekers were teenagers, and one of those was Mike Ramey, who was on the floor, weeping and crying out to God, surrounded by people who were praying with him. As I stood nearby, I heard someone say, 'God has called Mike to preach'. I thought to myself how wonderful it must be to have a calling, a sense of direction in life. As I gazed around the congregation and saw how the Holy Spirit was moving and working in people's lives, I began to praise God with all my heart. Completely occupied in praise and thoroughly engulfed in God's presence, I heard the voice of the Lord speak very clearly to me saying, 'I am calling you to preach'. It was the first time that I had ever heard the voice of God speaking to me (but it would not be the last).

I preached my first sermon at a home prayer meeting on Tuesday evening, November 27, 1973. My text was Gal. 6.16-26. I had no idea how to prepare a message or how to deliver it. The sermon was a disappointment both to me and to the audience, but I picked myself up and tried again two weeks later.

## Lee College Years

*For he satisfies the longing soul  
And fills the hungry soul with good things (Ps. 107.9).*

In light of my call to the ministry, I decided to transfer to Lee College and major in biblical studies. I began in January of 1974 and graduated in May of 1977 with a BA in Biblical Education (with honors).

My years at Lee College made a significant impact upon my academic preparation, my spiritual formation, my ministerial development, and my personal life. In addition to OT and NT Survey and courses in history and theology, I also studied Acts, Romans and Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Prison Epistles, General Epistles, Daniel and Revelation, Wisdom Literature, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets. Gifted and dedicated faculty members who influenced me include Robert O'Bannon, Sabord Woods, John Sims, Kyle Hudson, and Bill George. It was French Arrington, however, who best prepared me to become a Pentecostal Scholar. His courses were academically challenging and his lectures reflected serious engagement with critical scholarship. I enjoyed his New Testament Greek courses more than any in college. Learning Greek opened up for me a new world of possibilities in the study of the Bible.

My spiritual formation and ministerial development benefited from the college curriculum, but mostly they were furthered by my extra-curricular participation in 'Pioneers for Christ', a campus group founded by Lee College professor Charles Beach. Students in PFC held weekly prayer meetings, Wednesday evening worship, and services at the local nursing homes. PFC teams would also travel out of town on weekends, during breaks, and in the summer months to conduct revival meetings in Churches of God throughout the USA. We called those revival meetings 'Invasions'. My first sermon to a church congregation was delivered on an Invasion to the Florence, Alabama Church of God, March 8, 1974. I urged them to 'Wake Up!' (Rom. 13.11-12). I traveled with PFC to numbers of churches in Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, Louisiana, Ohio, New York, and Nebraska.

The Pioneers for Christ supplied me with a valuable 'internship' in ministry and gave me a community of faith in which to grow. I was encouraged by the spiritual example of students like Stan Ran-

kin (who would become my brother-in-law), by Charlie Stott (my roommate), and by Milton Carter, who became one of my best friends. Milton led a PFC team of nine students to New York City in the summer of 1974, a summer which would prove to be major turning point in my life. I learned the value of daily communion with God, as Charlie and I arose early every morning for an hour of prayer. It was also during that summer that I began to practice fasting on a regular basis.

Along with daily Bible reading, the practices of prayer and fasting began to transform both my relationship with God and my approach to ministry. My passion for God intensified, and at times the Holy Spirit would move mightily when I preached. I was witnessing healings, miracles, and genuine revival. My hunger for God was fueled even further by my reading of John Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Finney, Leonard Ravenhill, and E.M. Bounds.

My time at Lee College affected more than the academic, spiritual, and ministerial dimensions of my life. My personal life also took a 'right turn' during that time when I met and married my beautiful wife, Karen Luke. I quickly learned the depths of her love when, on our first Christmas together, she gave me the Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich's Greek-English Lexicon. She outdid herself the next year by giving me Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.

Karen's grandfather was a Church of God evangelist and pastor, and her parents attended the North Rocky Mount Church of God, making Karen a third generation Pentecostal. Her Pentecostal heritage has been a valuable component of our life together, and I have been deeply enriched by all the members of her family. In addition to her considerable gifts as musician, singer, teacher, and organizer, Karen is fully committed to the Pentecostal faith. When we began our pastoral ministry, she was probably more qualified to lead the church than I was.

## **Shepherding God's Flock**

*He lifts up the poor out of trouble's reach,  
And makes them families like a flock (Ps. 107.41).*

I graduated from Lee College in 1977, and we moved immediately to Scottsbluff, Nebraska, to pastor a mission church. The area was

predominately Lutheran and Roman Catholic, with the nearest Church of God 185 miles away in North Platte. We worked hard to get the church on its feet, paying all of the church bills ourselves. We went from there to Wichita, Kansas, where we followed a long-term pastor whose credentials had been revoked on account of adultery. The church was divided and our time there was difficult.

We enjoyed the adventure of ministering in Nebraska and Kansas, but by this time, our son Stephen had been born, and we were far away from the grandparents. We decided that we wanted to be closer to our families, so we moved east to a small church in Chatom, Alabama. I was learning that there was more to the ministry than what I had been taught in college. I realized that I could benefit from further preparation for pastoral ministry; therefore, we moved to Cleveland so that I could attend the Church of God School of Theology (now the Pentecostal Theological Seminary).

At the School of Theology, I studied with F.J. May and Robert Crick, whose courses offered me the opportunity to reflect upon my three years of pastoral experience. I already knew how to practice the Pentecostal faith, but Steve Land taught me how to understand Pentecostalism theologically and how to place the Pentecostal story with the larger Christian story. I appreciate Harold Hunter for introducing me to a wide array of contemporary issues in theology. Most important among those issues were the questions surrounding Spirit baptism both inside and outside of the Pentecostal tradition. He impressed me as a careful scholar who was not afraid to entertain hard questions. He insisted that the scriptures can be trusted and that we should not be afraid to follow them wherever they may lead. I had two courses with Rickie Moore (Deuteronomy and Isaiah), who began teaching in my final year at the Seminary. Rickie's approach to the biblical text was based on the rhetorical/literary methods that were just beginning to gain traction in the academy. While studying with Rickie, I realized that my high school and college courses in literature and poetry might prove themselves valuable after all. I began to read books and articles on the interpretation of the Bible as literature. The Seminary was still in its infancy, but already there were signs that it would contribute significantly to a revisioning of Pentecostal theology and scholarship.

It was toward the end of my seminary studies that, for the first time, I began to entertain a future ministry of teaching. Knowing

that a teaching career would require further education, I investigated a variety of ThM and PhD programs. Because I had so enjoyed my courses in Greek and Hebrew, my first choice of specialization was biblical languages. My second choice, however, was Old Testament, an area that was underrepresented in the Church of God. At that time I was unable to find a program that would be feasible. Karen was pregnant with our second son, Michael, and it seemed that the Lord was leading us to return to the pastorate and give attention to the children.

After graduation from the Seminary, I served for a short time as a pastor in Kentucky, where our second son, Michael, was born. We then moved to Arkansas. At the time, we did not understand why God placed us in Arkansas, but now we can see how the hand of God was working. During our time at McCrory, Arkansas, I adopted a regular routing of extended times for prayer and fasting. At the end of two years, the state overseer asked me if I would assume the pastorate at West Memphis. The church was in trouble and in danger of closing, so I told him that I was not at all interested. Nevertheless, I soon received a letter appointing me as pastor of the West Memphis Church of God. I called the overseer and registered my displeasure, but he would not reconsider the appointment. A few days later, I was contacted by people from the church who informed me of their own dissatisfaction with the overseer. It seems that they had requested Bud Jenkins as pastor, and if I came, they would not support me.

Under this cloud of uncertainty, we packed up and moved to West Memphis. As we were unloading our U-Haul, a man from the utility company came to shut off the church's gas because the bill was unpaid. I learned that many of the bills, including the mortgage payment, were two months behind. God helped us, and in four months we had all the bills caught up and seventy-five people in church. It was truly a miracle.

In view of the fact that I was remaining in pastoral ministry, I considered pursuing a DMin degree. As I was contemplating my options, I happened to be in Memphis for a hospital visit and passed by the Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, a reformed, fundamentalist institution. I stopped in and picked up a catalog, thinking that perhaps they would offer the DMin degree. If not, I might enroll in a course or two for my enrichment. To my

amazement, I found that they offered a ThD in biblical languages, the very degree that I had desired to enter four years earlier.

I am convinced that, after I finished seminary, God was working without my knowledge to bring me to a place where I could enter a doctoral program. While I was complaining about the stubborn overseer, God was using him to bring me to West Memphis.

Mid-America required that I take twenty-six hours of upper level Greek and Hebrew courses as prerequisites to the ThD. I finished those courses in one year and then entered the doctoral program. The Greek and Hebrew courses at Mid-America were very helpful to me on three fronts. First, because we were not allowed to use the English text in class, my facility in reading the original languages improved dramatically. Second, the doctoral seminars included extensive exposure to recent innovative approaches to language study and textual analysis, including modern linguistics, semantics, structuralism, and discourse analysis. Third, I was able to study other Semitic languages besides Hebrew – Aramaic, Ugaritic, Akkadian, and Egyptian.

As far as I know, I was the only Pentecostal enrolled at Mid-America, and I wanted to be a positive representative for the Church of God School of Theology and for Pentecostalism. I avoided making my Pentecostal theology a distraction to the class or an annoyance to the teachers, but occasionally, someone would ask for my opinion on the subject of tongues, healing, or other related topics. On those occasions, I would respond briefly if the teacher gave me the opportunity. The teachers and the students were always kind and considerate, but their stance was clearly cessationist.

The ThD studies were requiring quite a bit of my time, and my wife had secured a good teaching position; therefore, I decided that I would resign my pastorate and attend school full-time. I called the new overseer, Wayne Taylor, to inform him of my decision. I had no intention of asking Bro. Taylor for his advice or for his help because by this time I had suffered a number of disappointments from state overseers. One overseer reneged on his promises and left me stranded. Another threatened me with retribution if I did not follow his orders – to be exact, he said, ‘I will break your back’. At one church, I encountered a serious moral breach that could not be allowed to continue, so I visited my overseer to seek his guid-

ance. His response was, 'What do you expect me to do about it? Next year, when my time is up, I'm out of here'.

To my surprise, Bro. Taylor did not accept my resignation, but instead he offered to find me a better situation within driving distance of Memphis. Subsequently, he appointed me as pastor of the Sharpe's Chapel Church of God in Wynne, Arkansas. God gave me a dream that confirmed to me the appropriateness of the new appointment, and we enjoyed three years of productive ministry while I attended doctoral seminars and began my dissertation at Mid-America. I also I taught a Monday evening Greek course for my fellow pastors, and I taught a course at the summer camp meeting on the subject of pastoral ministry.

## **The Open Door**

*He makes the storm a calm, so that the waves are still ...*

*He guides them to their desired harbor (Ps. 107.30).*

By this time I had been elected to the State Council, and was also serving as chair of the State Ministerial Development Board. In that capacity I visited Cleveland in 1991, attending the MIP commissioning services as a representative from Arkansas. I happened to bump into Steve Land while I was in Cleveland, and after I had talked with him for a while, he asked me if I would consider moving to Cleveland and teaching part-time while I pastored. He knew of a local pastor who would be retiring soon and suggested that I might be able to assume his pastorate. I informed him that I had no desire to move at that time but that I would pray about it. Both of us understood that it would be nearly impossible for me, an out-of-state pastor, to receive an appointment in Cleveland. The next day, as I drove on Highway 64, along the Ocoee River, I began to pray about what had taken place. As I prayed, the Holy Spirit spoke to me saying, 'I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it' (Rev. 3.8). I knew that I would be moving to Cleveland. Two months later we began our ten-year pastorate at the Prospect Church of God in Cleveland. While serving as pastor, I also taught part-time at the Seminary. I taught one course at the Seminary in 1992 (Biblical Hebrew), and I taught two courses at Lee College the same year (Old Testament Theology and Psalms). The next year,

while Rickie Moore took a sabbatical leave, I taught a full load at the seminary and I taught Psalms again at Lee College. From 1993 forward, I taught only at the Seminary, where I was given a full load each year, along with student advising and committee work. I enjoyed both my preaching and my teaching ministries as they informed each other and grew simultaneously. Finally, after years of uncertain wandering, I felt like I had found my place in life.

Our move to Cleveland was naturally a stressful time for our family. However, as Stephen and Michael got adjusted to the new schools and new friends, they began to develop their impressive musical talents. In addition to his work on the piano, Stephen joined the school band and played the trombone. Michael also polished his skills on the keyboard, but he joined the show choir. Both of them performed vocal solos at school and at church. Stephen now leads music at his local church, and Michael is a performer at Dollywood theme park in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

Because of my busy schedule and because of insufficient supervision, I was finding it difficult to complete my dissertation for Mid-America. God knew that I needed to advance to a higher level of scholarship, and he knew how to push me to that higher level. Professor Willie Wessels, from the University of South Africa (UNISA), came to Cleveland to visit the Seminary, and he offered to accept me as a transfer student in the DTh program at UNISA. Professor Wessels had a strong background in historical critical methods, but he was also a Pentecostal pastor – a rare combination. I enrolled at UNISA and proceeded to work with Wessels as my supervisor in South Africa and with Rickie Moore as my supervisor in the USA.

As I pursued my thesis research, I began to sense that my time as a pastor was coming to a close, and that I should devote my full attention to teaching and scholarly pursuits. Knowing how easy it is for academics to lose touch with the realities of local church ministry, I tried to remain as long as possible with one foot in the pastorate and the other in academia. In 2005, however, I placed both feet firmly in the academy, but I retained the conviction that my pastoral experience should continue always to inform my scholarship.

In my first attempt to look at Judges from a Pentecostal perspective, I took the most obvious approach – I aimed to offer a fresh study of the passages where the Spirit of the Lord appears. After a

good deal of work, however, I decided that the role of the Spirit in Judges was not prominent enough (or diverse enough) to justify a doctoral thesis. Therefore, I channeled that research into a journal article.<sup>10</sup> My second attempt centered on issues of purity and power that have surfaced in relation to the judges. The relationship between purity and power is a crucial one among Pentecostals, who value both purity and power and who find it difficult to account for the immoral behavior of the Spirit empowered judges. Again, I chose not to pursue this obviously 'Pentecostal' topic, and I wrote another journal article.<sup>11</sup> After many hours of reading Judges, meditating on its stories, and praying about the most prominent themes of the book, I was unable to discover anything that I deemed worthy of an entire thesis. My hope for writing a 'Pentecostal' interpretation of Judges was fading away. Then suddenly and surprisingly, my focus on Judges was redirected through a charismatic event, a Pentecostal experience, in which the Holy Spirit spoke to me, pointing me to the Shema: 'Hear O, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength' (Deut. 6.4-5). Through this charismatic experience I realized that I had been reading Judges but not hearing Judges, and I determined that the terminology of 'hearing' captured concisely my hermeneutical goal as a Pentecostal. Later, while I was discussing my approach with a colleague, he asked me if the term 'hearing' was used in the book of Judges. Upon investigation, I discovered in Judges the repetition of the phrase, 'You have not heard my voice' (Judg. 2.2; 2.17, 20; 6.10), and I realized that Israel's failure to hear the voice of Yahweh was fundamental to the narrative. I discovered further that Yahweh speaks three times directly to Israel and that these three speeches occur at crucial points in the narrative.

While studying Judges, I was affected most powerfully by the realization that God is passionate both in his anger and in his compassion. What I heard in the three speeches of God was the suffer-

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<sup>10</sup> Lee Roy Martin, 'Power to Save!?: The Role of the Spirit of the Lord in the Book of Judges', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 16.2 (2008), pp. 21-50.

<sup>11</sup> Lee Roy Martin, 'Judging the Judges: Searching for Value in these Problematic Characters', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29.1 (2008), pp. 110-29. While there is no shortage of material for developing a thesis around the topic of purity and power, I realized that further pursuit of the subject would carry me too far away from Judges itself and into theology and Christian ethics.

ing of God, his vulnerability, the risk that he accepts when he enters covenant, his desire that his people know him and relate to him. In Judges 10, Yahweh admits to feeling abused and manipulated. Yahweh is not a distant, detached God; rather Yahweh is a responsive, relational God. Pentecostal prayer, preaching, and worship all presuppose this kind of relational God. My years in the pastorate, ministering to wounded people, have taught me the value of God's relationality.

Expressing my 'hearing' of Judges through an academic medium presented me with a difficult challenge. For me, because of my many years in pastoral ministry, there is only a fine line between hearing the text and preaching a sermon. A theological interpretation of Scripture is clearly distinct from a sermon but not very far removed from it. The two are on a continuum that does not include clear lines of demarcation to indicate where one ends and the other begins. In the process of writing, I studied Judges with my church congregation and as I discussed my work at length with seminary colleagues.

The Seminary community as a whole provided a rich context for creative theological construction. I was able to engage in ongoing dialogue with faculty members like Ayo Adewuya, Kim Alexander, Ken Archer, Hollis Gause, Jackie Johns, Cheryl Bridges Johns, and Steve Land. I gained much through regular post-grad seminars organized by Chris Thomas that featured works in progress by people like Robby Waddell, Dale Coulter, and Bob Debelak. I benefited as well from colleagues in the Society of Pentecostal Studies who critiqued my work along the way as I presented parts of it at the annual meetings. My most helpful dialogue partner was Chris Thomas, who served as something of an unofficial supervisor of my thesis. We talked about my work almost daily. During the final stages of my thesis writing, I would go over a chapter informally with Chris, then I would submit it to Rickie, who would often require me to rewrite various parts two or three times. I would finally send the chapter to Willie Wessels, who would evaluate it on the basis of the South African requirements. One of my thesis examiners declared that it was the best thesis he had read. Another examiner, Walter Brueggemann, called my work 'impressive', 'compelling', and a 'fine work of which Mr Martin can be justifiably proud'. At the end of

the process, I realized that I had been shaped into a Pentecostal scholar.

After finishing my thesis, I looked forward to a bit of rest, but new opportunities and responsibilities came to me fairly quickly. I was seated beside Melissa Archer in the Biblical Studies Interest Group Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies when I checked my email and learned that all examiners had approved my thesis and that I would be graduating the next month. Robby Waddell, sitting nearby, spoke up and nominated me as Interest Group Leader. Thus began my five year tenure as leader of the largest interest group in SPS. Leading the Bible group requires a significant commitment of time and energy, but it is rewarding work that has allowed me to become acquainted with a large number of biblical scholars in the Pentecostal tradition. The SPS Bible group has become one of my most treasured group of friends and an important source of constructive dialogue and fruitful ideas. My years in SPS and my work with the Bible group led to my election as second vice-president of SPS (a position that leads automatically to president). SPS is a valuable fellowship for me, and it is even more valuable for those scholars who labor in non-Pentecostal settings and have no local community of Pentecostal scholars. If we are to forge ahead into ever deeper theological waters, we need places like SPS, where the collegial environment invites dialogue. We need a safe environment where budding scholars can spread their wings, and where all of us can take risks without the threat of being ostracized.

As soon as I finished my thesis and received my doctorate, a major adjustment became necessary when Rickie Moore left the Seminary to become Chair of the Department Theology at Lee University. I had lived under the false assumption that I would always teach beginning Hebrew at the Seminary (I had even authored a Hebrew Grammar for use in our course), but with Rickie's departure, I was needed elsewhere. Months earlier, the Lord had prepared me for the transition by mysteriously removing my 'burden' for teaching the beginning Hebrew course. We began utilizing adjunct and part-time faculty to teach beginning Hebrew, while I picked up the Bible courses that Rickie Moore had taught.

The semester after Rickie left the Seminary, we began offering a full slate of online courses, and I was asked to develop and teach

'Pentecostal Explorations of the Old Testament' online. The next year, I developed an online Bible course on the book of Judges, which I teach regularly.

While teaching at the Seminary, Rickie served as editor of the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, but his expanded responsibilities at Lee University caused him to resign as editor, and I was asked to step in and fill that role. Serving as Associate Editor of the JPT has added significantly to my work load, but also it has benefited me in important ways. I have become acquainted with many Pentecostal scholars from around the world, giving me a broader knowledge of the global Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. Moreover, I have been enriched by reading journal articles that are outside my field of specialization, articles that I would not have read were I not the editor.

Another life-changing event occurred on May 17, 2008, when I awoke suddenly because of a sharp, crushing pain in the center of my chest. I should have called an ambulance, but instead I took two aspirin and sat in a recliner until the pain subsided to a dull ache. I struggled through the morning and early afternoon, praying and believing God for healing. I recited to God all of the healing testimonies from Scripture, and I reminded him of the healings that I had witnessed and experienced. When one is faced with death, the doctrine of healing is not a point for theoretical debate, and the belief in God's present willingness to intervene on our behalf is not a dusty tradition. During that time of wrestling with God, I became convinced that God had kept me alive through the day and that I would 'not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord' (Ps. 118.17). Nevertheless, with the pain continuing, I went to the hospital emergency room and underwent tests that showed a 99 per cent blockage in the left descending cardiac artery (but no heart damage). After four arterial grafts (bypasses) and five days of recovery, I returned home with a good prognosis.

I came home from my heart surgery with a desire to narrow my priorities and eliminate fruitless pursuits that can eat away at valuable time. As Red resolved near the end of the *The Shawshank Redemption*, 'Get busy living or get busy dying'.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, I now

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<sup>12</sup> *The Shawshank Redemption* (directed by Frank Darabont; Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 1994).

focus my time and energy on two primary areas: (1) family and (2) ministry, which consists of teaching and scholarship.

Our family has grown over the years. Our daughter Kendra was born in 1995. Since that time, we have sponsored pajama parties; we have transported her to dance classes; we have attended recitals and ballet performances; we have chaperoned school field trips; and we have purchased formal gowns for school dances.

Not long after Kendra was born, our son Stephen married his wife Marilyn, and she has been a wonderful addition to the family. Stephen and Marilyn live in Miami, Florida and have two boys, Caleb and Joshua, whom we love dearly. A few years ago, Karen's father moved in with us. He is now eighty-six years of age and continues to be very active.

Because this narrative relates my journey in Pentecostal scholarship, I have omitted numerous important events from my personal life and pastoral experience. I would not want my reader to come away with the impression that those unstated moments are any less significant. My relationship with my wife, my children (and now grandchildren) has been and continues to be the most valuable part my life. I cannot imagine how I would have survived without Karen's steadfast love and companionship. Furthermore, my life would have been much diminished without the joy of watching Stephen, Michael, and Kendra grow into the amazing people that they have become.

My ministry, which started with preaching, continues to include regular preaching, both at my local church (Grace Community Church of God) and at other Church of God congregations. Most of my present ministry, however, consists of teaching, both at PTS, at other educational institutions, and in churches. In addition to teaching, I continue to be involved in research, writing, publishing, and editing. In the autumn of 2008, I joined with Chris Thomas and Steve Land in the founding of the Centre for Pentecostal Theology. Housed in its own facilities on the Campus of the Pentecostal Theological Seminary, the Centre is dedicated to facilitating the conception, birth, and maturation of constructive Pentecostal Theology across the theological disciplines. Chris and I also established CPT Press with modest hopes of publishing affordable constructive Pentecostal scholarship.

We live in opportune times for Pentecostal scholarship. Earlier generations of Pentecostals who sought post-graduate education were forced to leave their faith at the door of the university. Especially in the field of biblical studies, scholarship was dominated by modernist illusions of scientific objectivity. Today, however, the academy recognizes the legitimacy of ideological, sociological, contextual, and confessional readings of Scripture. Unfortunately, there are still a few people who argue against the viability of a Pentecostal hermeneutic. One such person remarked, 'I am an Old Testament scholar. I just happen to be Pentecostal'. In light of those kind of statements, I have coined the phrase, 'Happenstance Hermeneutics'. As I have argued elsewhere, I contend that if we do not construct and adopt a Pentecostal hermeneutic, then we will adopt someone else's hermeneutic:

We can choose either to adopt the current dominant models without considering the subsequent effect upon our tradition, or we can carefully and intentionally formulate contextual models of interpretation that integrate available contemporary methods with the ethos of our tradition. I propose that we follow the latter course and construct a Pentecostal hermeneutic that employs the hermeneutical methods that are more conducive to our ethos, theology and view of Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

My ministry of teaching and scholarship is motivated by a concern for the formation of present and future Pentecostal ministers and scholars (2 Tim. 2.2) who practice a Pentecostal faith that is genuine and vibrant. The preservation of an ancient, fictional, idealized version of Pentecostalism is not my desire. We cannot recover the past even if we wanted to do so. However, if the Pentecostal movement hopes to continue its growth and impact in the world, it must have ministers and scholars who understand and are committed to the distinctive heart of the tradition and who can hear what the Spirit is now saying to the Church. We must continue to practice the Full Gospel if we are to fulfill the role for which God raised us up.

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<sup>13</sup> Martin, Lee Roy, *The Unheard Voice of God: A Pentecostal Hearing of the Book of Judges* (JPTSup, 32; Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2008), p. 57.

## Conclusion

*Oh, that people would praise the Lord for his goodness  
And for his wonderful works to their children (Ps. 107.15).*

I am now closer to the end of my life than to the beginning. God has redeemed me from my wandering and drifting. I do not have answers to all my questions, but I think I have a better idea of what is important and what is peripheral. And I have hope. In *The Shawshank Redemption*, which I mentioned above, Red scoffed at the value of hope, but at the end of the movie he uttered these words of longing: ‘I hope I can make it ... I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope’.<sup>14</sup> I hope that I will continue to praise God for his goodness. I hope that I will not forget how he saved me, kept me, blessed me, changed me, guided me, loved me, and healed me. I hope that I can always teach others the ‘wonderful works’ of God. I hope that I will continue to grow and to listen to the Holy Spirit. I hope that, instead of just reiterating the past, I can participate with others in creative scholarship that propels us to a hopeful future. I hope.

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<sup>14</sup> Red, in *The Shawshank Redemption*.