

## Conversion and Call to the Ministry

From my earliest memory, we attended church somewhere. The earliest memory is at Providence Baptist Church, Holly Ridge, NC, even after we moved to Richlands the latter part of 1938. Many times we traveled back to Providence for Sunday School and worship, and also to visit with relatives and friends.

After moving to Richlands, my memory is of attending the Richlands Christian Church, where my Mother's sister and her family worshipped. For years I preserved the Sunday School lessons, in sheet form, tied by a ribbon. The stack reached at least two inches in thickness.

I suppose it was after my Father's conversion to Christ in the summer of 1940 or 1941, we began to attend Richlands Baptist Church. The early days included teachers as Mrs. Julia Marshburn and Mrs. Hatchie Koonce. These two made quite an impression on me, and some memories remain until this day. Many of my friends, as well as my sisters, made their commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior.

Perhaps the summer of 1943 or 1944, at Singletary Lake Bible Camp, Mr. Goodman, my cabin counselor, took the Bible and showed me the plan of salvation and how to be saved. Since I had grown up in church, and hearing the Bible taught in homes and other places by my Father and others, I knew all the answers and gave the correct answer to his questions.

A couple of year later, when polio was bad, anyone under the age of 16 was discouraged about being in public, which also included two churches not having Sunday School for those under sixteen years of age. Since I had been taught to attend Sunday School and church, I phoned someone at the Christian Church in Richlands and discovered Sunday School was for any who desired to attend. I began attending the Christian Church and also singing in the Children's Choir.

Around the age of twelve, one Sunday morning, there was a touching of my heart and I responded to the invitation to join the church. I was asked, "Do you believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and do you take Him for your personal Savior?" I responded in the affirmative and was later baptized by, I think, "Dad" Wilson. I would continue to attend the Christian church for many years, as a loyal member. At some point I moved my membership to Providence Baptist Church, Holly Ridge, NC, where I had been born.

As the years passed, between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, there was a searching and a longing for something I did not have, and had not experienced. Often at Singletary Lake Bible Camp, I would raise my hand

to indicate I wasn't sure if I was saved or not. I would not respond to the invitation in the church I was attending, since the people believed I was already a Christian, nor in a church in other places, since, as I reasoned, they do not know me. This unrest and searching continued until a Friday night in October 1951. We had been attending revival services whenever Evangelist Oliver Greene from Greenville, SC, was preaching.

During the afternoon and as we traveled to Roseboro, NC, to the service in the old tabernacle, deep within me a message continued to play with great emphasis. It went something like this:

From Genesis 6:3, "My spirit shall not always strive with man;" "This is the last time I will call you. If you do not accept My Son as your Savior tonight, I will not bother you again. This is your last chance." This message was in my mind until the time of invitation, at which I responded and was taken into the Prayer Room where a personal worker talked with me. In response as to why I had come forward, I responded, "Tell me how to be saved as though no one had ever told me." The worker showed me from the Bible how Jesus had come to be the Savior and His death on the cross was payment for my sin, and to accept Him would give me forgiveness of sin and eternal life. When the discussion was over, He asked me, "Son, will you believe this?" I responded I would and he told me to get on my knees (on a concrete floor) and tell Jesus what was in my heart and what I wanted to do and what I wanted Jesus to do for me. This I did, and have realized ever since, there was a dramatic change that night in my life.

There was no earth shaking, or flashes of lightening, or thunder rolling, but a simple response to the wooing of the Holy Spirit. From that night on, I knew there was a change, and I have never doubted my salvation, because this man showed me from the Bible what God had promised if I would believe and accept Jesus Christ as my Savior.

Through the years, there have been soul searching moments to crystallize my belief on basic doctrines of the Christian Faith, but never a doubt. Some sleepless nights walking the streets of Ramey Air Force Base in Puerto Rico, God guided me to the understanding of the absolute truthfulness of the Bible.

### Call to the Ministry

I cannot point to a particular time or place when I sensed God was calling me into the Gospel Ministry, later refined to the Pastorate. It is as though there was a growing into this realization. On one occasion, my father stated,

“I hope God calls you into the ministry.” My response was, “He already has.” My father was a bi-vocational pastor and worked at a saw mill where we lived. I had “grown up” at the mill and watched the workers and even helped out at times. The summers I was 16, 17, and 18, I drove a truck hauling logs and lumber. It was a joy to be driving. Trucks with long trailers would come to the mill for loading. This heightened my interest in driving a cross country truck. Once, I was allowed to sit in the cab of one of the trucks and move it for the driver. They always had words of encouragement.

Having sensed the call to the ministry, and with one year of college, the summer just before I turned 19, I was bringing a load of logs out of the woods. It was necessary to stop and arrange boards so crossing a creek would be safe. Somehow the truck engine cut off and would not start. Being perplexed, I wondered what I would do. Something came over me, and I leaned on the door, with my arm braced into the window, and head on my arm and prayed words something like this, “Lord, I will give this up and be the pastor you want me to be. I will say goodbye the idea to being a cross country truck driver.”

I got back into the cab of the truck, turned on the ignition, pushed the starter, and the engine came to life. I knew I had made an irrevocable commitment to my Lord to be the Minister He wanted me to be. Getting close to graduation from college, I even considered working with the Baptist Children’s Homes of North Carolina. Following an interview, I knew God still wanted me in the pastorate. I went to a staff member of the college, who gave me the name of a Mission type church in Selma, NC. I preached for about six weeks when the Mission called me to be their pastor, and for the next thirty seven years served in four churches. I had previously resigned my first church, entered the Air Force by the leading of the Holy Spirit, and became a Hospital Corpsman. I later worked at Wayne Memorial Hospital in Goldsboro, NC, while also serving as pastor in Selma, NC. This service helped prepare me to be more successful in ministering to people in their time of need.

Many times throughout my ministry, my name would be placed into consideration for a position in other types of ministry. Each time someone else would be called to the place of service, which was a way the Lord was saying to me He wanted me to remain in the Pastoral Ministry. I have never forgotten the call to conversion and call to the ministry, nor looked back, wondering if I had made the correct decision. The spirit of Servanthood has been part of my ministry for which I am most appreciative the Lord called me.