

Apostolic Iron

Online Periodical

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MY “PENTECOSTAL HERITAGE”

Dear Brother, Friend, and Reader,

This a critical time in the history of both the Church universal and of our own church organization. At the beginning of the last century, brethren who had recently received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost were of great assistance to the Church by provoking discussion and stimulating Biblical study through their writing ministry. Energized by these spiritual catalysts, the Church’s doctrinal foundation was congealed over time and the Apostolic Movement was birthed. Brethren such as G T Haywood, Frank Ewart, Andrew Urshan and others published articles in their periodicals which provided direction, inspired hunger for God, imparted understanding and revelation, and brought us together; thus laying the foundation for the organizations which eventually merged to become the UPCI and for several other present day Apostolic fellowships.

In this day, God is calling more men of God to write. I feel that I am one of those whom He has called, though I have wrestled with the Lord and procrastinated doing so for all the obvious reasons. It is one thing to open your heart to your friends; it is quite another to lay yourself bare for all to see — and judge. However, there are some things which God has laid on my heart to communicate through this online periodical that I can no longer postpone without greatly displeasing Him.

The Lord said that we are to know them that labor among us. Therefore, I felt that it was important and relevant in light of the articles which have been and will be published on this website (and later in print), that you be given the opportunity to “know where I am coming from,” to get some perspective as to how I think, and to obtain some insight as to what my motives may be. In reading anyone’s writing, the perspective of the author is almost as important as the content of his writing. A person’s motive is as important as his argument. Therefore, the following narrative is the story of who I am as a Pentecostal and where I am going as an Apostolic. Thank you in advance for taking the time to read this article.

MY STORY:

My spiritual journey began in February of 1946, just five months after the United Pentecostal Church was formed in St. Louis, Missouri in September, 1945. My mother was attending a UPC church in Pensacola, Florida when I was born. To the best of our knowledge, the first Apostolic church in the state of Florida was started in my maternal grandmother’s living room. This heritage made me a “third generation Pentecostal.”

My Dad was in the U.S. Navy and was transferred frequently. Throughout all of my childhood, regardless of where we were living at any particular time, we attended services at a UPC church. I accepted whatever the Sunday School teachers taught in whatever church we happened to be attending. I was obedient to whatever nuances of doctrine that were taught by the pastor of the church we were attending. By the time that I was 18 years old, I was a “member” of UPC churches in the North, South, East, West, and Middle of the United States.

GOD SEEKS FOR ME!

My first encounter with God happened during a church service in Pensacola when I was five years old. My Dad was serving overseas in the Korean War. I was asleep in church with my head lying in my mother’s lap when something woke me up. I sat up and saw a lady preacher walking back and forth across the platform, swinging her left arm which happened to be in a cast from the elbow down. She was saying, “The Lord is coming soon; the Lord is coming soon.” I felt something very powerful in that service and was deeply moved by it. Years later I would learn that the feeling was called “conviction.”

My Dad was not a Christian at the time and somehow I knew this even as a child. I felt no concern at all for myself, but I was very concerned for him. I began to pray for him under the anointing of the Spirit (obviously I did not understand what this was at that time). I wept and cried out to God to “save my Dad.” I do not remember how long that I prayed, but it was long enough that I completely soaked my mother’s skirt with my tears and the discharge from my nose. I remember thinking that my mother’s skirt was ruined, but that it did not matter because Jesus was coming. It was many years before the Lord answered that prayer, but He did! The result of that prayer and many others prayed by myself, my mother, and others is that my Dad is now in heaven.

THE BEGINNING OF MY SEARCH FOR GOD.

My first memory of praying for my own salvation was around the age of nine. I was at a camp meeting in Tennessee and went to the altar and prayed for a long time. I do not remember what was preached or why I went to the altar. Even though I cried, “repented,” and had “stammering lips,” nothing life-changing happened to me. I became a “regular” seeker in every altar service after that, but still nothing happened.

The Sunday night after my 12th birthday I went to the altar in Jacksonville, Florida. I prayed for awhile and started to get up like always, but a 17 year old girl would not let me get up. The girl said to me, “Chester, I am not going to let you get up until you receive the Holy Ghost.” I believed her! My seeking reached a new level of earnestness in a short amount of time. Sometime later that evening, I was baptized with the Holy Ghost and spoke in tongues for about an hour. Then, I was baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of my sins.

Even though I was now “saved,” it seemed that nothing significant had really changed in my life. I had always been considered a “good kid.” It did not feel to me as though I was now a “better person.” I went to school, played with my friends, and went to church. Occasionally I would have another “experience” with the Holy Ghost and would speak in tongues, but it was not something that I really looked forward to or that I really enjoyed. It was more traumatic than dramatic because of the difficulty of working through the same routine again and again just to speak in tongues. First I would cry until the tears came, which were then followed closely by some “Jesus, Jesus, Jesusing” mixed with some “hallelujah, hallelujahs” for a long while. Eventually came the stammering lips which lasted for what seemed like ages. Then, finally something would take over my tongue and I would begin speaking in a

foreign language (which I perceived at the time that I could not stop, but in reality I was afraid to stop because it took so long to get it going in the first place). The only recognizable benefit to me seemed to be that I felt “reassured” (once again) that I was “still saved.” I rarely ever prayed any significant amount of time outside of church services; I almost never read my Bible on my own. My relationship was not really as much with God as it was with the church and the people of whatever congregation we were attending at the time.

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH THE ANOINTING.

My next remarkable spiritual experience occurred when I was fourteen. I was a very shy young person, especially in public. When among people that I was not close to, I rarely said a word. One night in a youth service in Cranston, Rhode Island, the leader asked a girl and me to each give a five minute “sermonette.” I had never spoken in public before except for very brief testimonies given during a few “testimony services.” And, every time I “gave a testimony” it was a very painful and difficult experience because of my shyness.

The girl went first and was very brief. When it was my turn, something very different happened. A new feeling came over me accompanied by a boldness that was totally foreign to me. Words began to come to me and I spoke in a very animated and demonstrative manner for over 45 minutes. Everyone including me was stunned. There was a tremendous move of God in that service. Everyone began to cry and pray, not because of what I had said, but because everyone recognized the miracle of the anointing that had just occurred. I knew after that service that my future would never be the same. Later during the following summer at a youth camp in Old Town, Maine, I acknowledged publicly for the first time a call to preach. Still, although I had made this declaration, nothing significantly changed in my involvement with God. While I never denied my “call,” I was determined to procrastinate obeying as long as God would allow.

MY “CONVICTIONS”

My “personal code of conduct” was taught to me by my mother from a spiritual perspective, and by my father from a moral and honor perspective. It was my father who strongly forbade me to drink, smoke, or use profanity (even though as a sinner he did all three). As stated before, while living at home from 1946 to 1964, I attended a UPC church in every area of the country, but I do not remember even one message preached on holiness standards during all of those years. I am not saying that there was never anything preached on the subject, just that I have NO memory of even one message. All of my holiness teaching came from my mother. Consequently, I did not dance, go to movies, etc. I did play sports, wear shorts, go mixed bathing, and watch TV (which we had because of my father) all of my childhood.

I considered myself (and I assume was considered by others who knew me) to be a “good Christian.” No one had ever taught me or confronted me to the contrary. We went to every church service. I even played the trumpet during worship. I obeyed what my current pastor taught, and my family participated in all of the activities of the church. I was obedient to my parents and I was respectful to my elders. I was a good student in school and I was helpful at home. During this time I had no concept or perception that there was anything lacking in my life as a Christian. I would pray when there was a problem (and received answers), but that was usually the extent of my personal involvement with God outside of church activities. I was trying very hard to be saved by “being good” because I thought that this was what God expected of me.

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH SOMEONE WHO KNEW JESUS.

During the spring of my senior year of high school (1964), I experienced a dramatic, life altering encounter. We were living in Prince George's County, Maryland, right across the border from Washington, D.C. We were attending the UPC church that was located within the city limits of Washington at that time. Two ministers were traveling around to various churches doing Sunday school seminars. One would teach the classes and the other would preach the night services. At this time we were living in the best house we had ever owned because my Dad, who had been an enlisted man in the Navy for 17 years, was now a Commissioned Officer. Even though my Dad was not a Christian, he totally supported my mother's (and consequently my) participation in church. Since the usual custom back then was for visiting ministers and their families to stay in the homes of someone in the church, my mother, as she had done on previous occasions (with my Dad's permission), offered to keep the two ministers in our home.

Up until that time, my whole concept of Christianity and church was one of participating in a specific, "prescribed" church service format. This format for church services did not vary appreciably, regardless of which area of the country we were living in. The more formal denominations typically identify a systematic worship service format as a "liturgy." Although Pentecostals would never consider using that particular terminology, the word is defined as: "prescribed forms or ritual for public worship in any of various religions or churches" (Webster's Dictionary). Thus, even though we were Pentecostal, we most certainly followed a prescribed form of worship during all of my childhood.

This "Pentecostal liturgy" was occasionally "divinely interrupted" (this is what it was called) by a time of praise activity which some called "a move of God" or "a demonstration of the Spirit." (As a child I never understood why God would have to interrupt what we were doing "for Him" in order to do what He wanted to do. Frankly, at 61, I still do not understand.) Participation in these times of worship was not for me. I was too shy and reserved (nice words for "proud") to ever act like that publicly. I would sometimes raise my hands in prayer and clap my hands when singing. But, that was enough! To do any more than this was too embarrassing. Anyway, I was certain that I was not the only one in the various churches who felt this way. Most of the demonstration was left to the few who were "given" to that kind of thing. After experiencing these "demonstrations," people would usually leave church saying what a wonderful service we had. Still, these "wonderful" services held no appeal for me. They only made me feel uncomfortable.

My most significant experiences with "moves of God" involved weeping and usually sobbing. Because these experiences were so draining and left me feeling extremely vulnerable and out of control, I avoided having them as much as possible. Occasionally when God in His mercy would speak directly to my heart, I would yield to Him and weep, but I remained uncomfortable with the amount of surrender that I felt He was calling me to. I did not understand the specifics of this surrender, the benefits of *any* surrender, or the privilege of being granted surrender. Unfortunately I had no one with whom I felt comfortable to discuss my feelings and my confusion. So, I lived most of the "saved" period of my childhood and youth with no direction, no counsel, and no comfort.

Despite my uncertainty, I did not realize that my journey in this "spiritual desert" was about to change. All of these feelings and difficulties were to be confronted in a most unusual manner. In all of my lifetime of going to church and hearing preachers preach, I had never been around anyone like the preacher who was staying in our home. His name was Bro. Marvin Cole. He "talked" to God all the time?! Whether he was walking through the house, sitting at the table, riding in the car, sitting in the living room, or whatever else; he had a

continual conversation going on with Jesus. I had never seen anybody just “talk” to God! And, he was doing it outside of a church service. This amazed me!

There was something very different about Bro. Cole. Nothing he did seemed to be “religious.” He was not showy or pretentious like some of those who participated in “demonstration” seemed to me to be. Doing what he did was neither offensive nor repulsive to me. In fact it seemed very, very real...and strangely and strongly inviting. He acted as though it was all just normal behavior and yet extremely enjoyable at the same time. I was remarkably and very powerfully drawn to him and his God. Although it would be almost 20 years before I ever saw or communicated with Bro. Cole again, I NEVER forgot how he so powerfully introduced me to the reality of a relationship with Jesus.

Bro. Cole’s presence in our home and the intimacy of the presence of God that he introduced to me affected more than just me. I found out several years later that my Dad had been so personally moved by Bro. Cole’s walk with God and had perceived how moved that I had been, he gave Bro. Cole an 8X10 photo of me and asked him to pray for me. When I eventually learned of my Dad’s actions, it reconfirmed to me the fact that my encounter with God through Bro. Cole was God ordained.

The intimacy of Bro. Cole’s communication with God was totally foreign to me. I had neither experienced it myself nor I had I ever witnessed it in anyone’s life — ever. I had no idea that such communication was possible or that it would even be welcomed by God. Wherever and whenever Bro. Cole talked to God, the whole atmosphere would be charged and alive. He was only in our home for two days — two days! — but, after he left, church services seemed extremely hollow, empty, and lifeless to me by comparison. And, it was IM-POSSIBLE for an eighteen year old not to notice the difference.

ENTERING THE FIRE OF THE FURNACE.

While I was deeply moved by this encounter, my life was not immediately changed by it. Less than two months later I entered the United States Naval Academy as a Midshipman. For the first time in my life there was NO UPC CHURCH to attend or depend on. There was no Apostolic pastor anywhere in the immediate area to preach to me. Because we had moved around so much, there was no pastor anywhere who felt any responsibility for me. I was completely on my own spiritually: no saints, no Sunday school teacher, no youth leader, no preacher, no one to prop up my Christianity for me.

Since there was no Apostolic church in the Annapolis area which I could attend, I was required to attend the Naval Academy Chapel services. I sang in the choir and attended what other “Christian” activities were available, but none of this was able to even remotely help me sustain my spiritual life. I was on my own!

During my four years at the Naval Academy, my conduct did not change to any degree from the lifestyle I had been taught in church. Doing “good” or “right” had been deeply ingrained in me and was my habit of life. It was not that I never failed, but I never changed my code of conduct. In fact, because I had been “taught” against dancing; when faced with being required to attend dancing classes and dress balls, I wrote a letter to the administration of the Naval Academy requesting to be exempted. The letter stated that if it was decided that I would not be excused from dancing, the letter would then become my resignation from the Academy. The exemption was granted. I was the only one of all of my classmates (1300 +) who did not have to attend dancing classes or any of the required dances.

When the upper classmen found out that I was a “practicing Christian,” they told me that they were going to “break me.” They pointed out to me other Midshipmen who had entered the Academy as “Christians” and were no longer living their previous convictions. They vowed to make me do just like the others. I remember thinking, “Not me you aren’t!”

They started out by ordering me to use profanity and give reports on things which were vulgar and immoral. I staunchly refused to do any of those things which they ordered. This infuriated the upper classmen and they severely punished me for my “disobedience” to them. Because their orders were technically illegal, they could not place me on report for my disobedience. However, every day for over six months, and throughout the day from early in the morning until late at night, they took turns attempting to break me by putting tremendous physical, mental, and emotional pressure on me. I never retreated; not just because I felt that my lifestyle was “right,” but because it was the dictates of my “religion.” Frankly, it was also because I can be just that stubborn when I think I am right. I did not realize at the time that my ability to resist and endure was not because of my own strength or stubbornness. I was only able to endure because of the grace of God which empowered me to do what I could not do through my own strength. Unfortunately it would be many years before I understood this principle or would be able to acknowledge the truth of it.

In addition to the pressure of the upperclassmen, most of my own classmates expressed, subtly and not so subtly, their own rejection of my chosen lifestyle. More and more I felt very alone. Gradually it became very rare that I would be invited to go out with any of them on the few occasions when we did have “liberty.” My refusal to do with them the things that they wanted to do, but were against my “beliefs” to do, pricked their consciences; therefore, my presence was, at the least, a great inconvenience.

Nothing outwardly changed while I was on my own at the Academy, yet inside I was beginning the life-long process of inward change. Since I was experiencing persecution because of my “religion,” I sought to find some comfort and support from other Midshipmen, both classmates and upperclassmen, who were “Christians” of some kind or other. There were not many of them, but frequently we would gather in someone’s room (usually during “study hour” when we were supposed to be studying) and talk about the Bible and our individual beliefs.

Of course I was the only one in the group that was a “Pentecostal.” And, I felt that it was my duty to “straighten them out,” as I “knew” that their “doctrine” was wrong. But, a “funny” thing happened during those discussions. As I strongly stated the things that “I believed,” I soon came to realize that I was actually just repeating the things that I had been taught in Sunday School. The doctrines were not mine. I had accepted them, conformed to them, and obeyed them; but, I had never made an effort to make them mine. They had seemed right, felt right, and I had experienced personally what had been taught in them, but they were NOT my doctrines or my beliefs. I just accepted the doctrines without challenge. And, now that someone else was challenging them, my total inability to defend them proved to me that the doctrines **were not mine!**

Over the same six month period that I was suffering in my fight to maintain my outward conduct, my inward confidence in what I believed slowly ebbed to zero. Eventually I reached the place that I did not know what to sort out as truth from what I believed. I was under tremendous pressure outwardly and completely confused inwardly. It would have made life much easier (at least it seemed that way to me at the time) if I could have just denied it all and been like everyone else. But, I could not deny the things which I had experienced and felt as a child and as a young person. I did not doubt the reality of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost which I had received. Most of all, I could not escape what I remembered encountering and feeling when Bro. Cole had stayed in our house. I did not doubt the reality of God; I just did not have a relationship with Him personally, and neither did I know how to find it for myself.

I did not understand at the time that God had orchestrated everything in my life exactly the way He had planned it in order to get me to this very place. I could not go backwards and

did not know how to go forward. Out of desperation and fear for my salvation, I thought that quitting the Academy and going to Bible school would solve my problems and resolve my confusion. But, my sinner Dad encouraged me to pray about it and give it all a little more time. When I prayed I could feel no release from God to quit. So, I stayed — one day at a time.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION OF A WALK WITH GOD.

For my 19th birthday in February of my first year at the Naval Academy, my mother gave me my first “study” Bible. I do not know how I knew to do this and I do not remember how I decided to do it, but shortly after receiving the Bible, I knelt by my bunk and prayed. I spoke to God and told Him, “I am confused and lost. I don’t know what truth is or who has it. I don’t know who is right and I don’t care what they are called. I am willing to be a Catholic, a Baptist, a Mormon, a Jehovah’s Witness, a Pentecostal, or anything else as long as it has the truth. It does not matter to me what anyone thinks about what I become or whom I choose to fellowship with in truth. I want to please You only and be accepted by You only. But, I want to know truth and I want to know You. Either You are a liar or You truly are ‘no respecter of persons.’ If Your Spirit is truly given to us for the purpose of leading and guiding us into all truth, then I am going to pray and study this Bible diligently and You are going to show me what the truth is. I vow to You that whatever You show me to be truth, I will be faithful to it for the rest of my life regardless of the cost. I promise to never add to Your Word or take away from it. I promise to never go to the Bible to find a way to prove what I think, but I will always allow the Bible to tell me what to think. I promise that when You show me something in the Bible new that I have not seen before, once I have tested it by two or more Scriptural witnesses and proven it to be true, I will immediately change what I believe to conform to what You have shown me. I promise to never again give my allegiance to any religious group or their doctrines over what Your Word tells me. I promise to never again believe or practice any doctrine that I cannot personally support from Your Word. I want You and only You! I want to know You, first and foremost, above all others and above all else. In Jesus name!” To this day, over 42 years later, this prayer is still my guiding principle of faith and following God.

Except for God’s grace, the consequences of this prayer would have made it impossible for me to have graduated from the Naval Academy; because, from that time forward, I spent almost all of my study time searching the Scriptures. I remember very little of any of the material covered by any of my college courses. I saw where Jesus said, “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39); so, I did. I had an insatiable appetite for the Word of God. I wanted to know for myself what God had really said and taught; I wanted to know the truth. I thought that I was just searching for the truth of His Word and his true doctrines, but in the process of my search I found Jesus.

I used hundreds of 8 ½ by 11 lined sheets of notebook paper and a pencil to record Scriptures on the various subjects of doctrine that the Lord directed me to and taught me concerning. Somehow I did understand that truth cannot contradict truth; therefore, I believed that a true understanding of the doctrines of the Bible would resolve all seeming “contradictions.” I also somehow understood that it was error to establish a doctrine on a single verse of Scripture. I did not understand that it was the Lord who led me to use “the topical method” of Bible study. There just were things I wanted to know the Biblical answers about, so I studied topics. I was not studying to preach, pass a test, win an argument, or get a diploma or degree. I was studying because I wanted to know God and His Word for myself.

So, I studied and prayed; and I prayed and studied. When I thought that I had a clearer understanding of truth on a particular subject, I would go into my “laboratory” to test it:

I would return to the same Bible discussions which had undermined my faith. Over the course of two years of intense study and prayer, with no one to guide me but God, I eventually received an understanding of truth that no one in those discussions could refute.

It is not possible for anyone to imagine how surprised I was when the truth that God had shown me for myself proved to be very similar in almost all points of doctrine to that taught by the churches in which I was raised. In some ways this was almost distressing to me, because I was sure that anyone I told this story to would conclude that I had just subconsciously learned to explain my “old” doctrine better. **THAT IS NOT TRUE!** God Himself knows that I did not look to become an Apostolic Pentecostal. I searched the Word to become a true Biblical disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of where and to whom that discipleship led me.

As a result, my fellowship with the United Pentecostal Church today is NOT based on my believing what is taught by that particular organization. No, my only basis of fellowship is that the UPCI ended up being the group which most closely stands for what God showed me for myself. My allegiance is to God’s Word first and foremost, not to any organization!

UNEXPECTED FRUIT.

While I participated in the process of being led by God into truth, I did not realize that several of my classmates had been watching this process and listening as the Lord answered their questions while He was answering mine. Almost two years to the day after that prayer of challenge and commitment to God, the first of seven fellow Midshipmen who would do the same came to me and said that he wanted to be baptized in Jesus’ name and receive the Holy Ghost. I was astounded! God gave me fruit even though I had not been seeking for it; I was only seeking for Him.

I understood at that time that I could not baptize anyone myself. I had heard about Bro. Wayne Trout in Dover, Delaware, which was one hour’s drive from Annapolis. I called his church, explained who I was, and asked if they could send a minister over to baptize a Midshipman, since we did not have the liberty to travel to Dover. I called a few churches in Annapolis that I thought might have a baptistry and asked if they would allow us to use it to baptize a Midshipman. I found one church that agreed, but they said that since we were Pentecostal, we could not have a service; we could only baptize. They gave us 30 minutes to be in and out.

Bro. John Hopkins Sr. (father of the minister who has been a missionary to Panama for many years) came over to do the baptizing. Duane Ammerman was from Altoona, Pennsylvania. He had never been in a Pentecostal type service in his entire life. He had never seen anyone worship Pentecostal-style. He had never heard anyone speak in tongues. Since we could not have a service and because of the time limitations, Bro. Hopkins was only able to speak with Duane for a few minutes to make sure he understood what he was doing. Then, he prayed with him. Bro. Hopkins and Duane walked down into the water together; I stayed on the steps outside the Baptistry. When Duane came up out of the waters of Baptism, without prompting he raised his hands straight up in the air and began to praise God out loud. This was extremely unusual conduct for him because he was a very, very shy person — even more shy than me. I immediately knew that something supernatural was happening.

It seemed like only a few moments after Duane began to praise God that he began to speak in tongues. Awhile later he began to “laugh in the Spirit.” I had been around Pentecostal services all of my life and had heard about times when people would “laugh in the Spirit,” but I had never personally heard anyone do it.

I was shocked and overwhelmed! Duane was standing in the water speaking in tongues and laughing in the Spirit, while I was standing outside the baptistry absolutely

bawling my eyes out. All I could think was: "God really is real. This really is truth. This really is real!" The reason? I knew that Duane had never seen or heard anything that he was now doing. The only way he knew about it was from what I had shown him in the Bible. Freely I had received; freely I had given. What I had shown him, God had first shown me — this was genuinely the Truth!

Out of my being that day flowed a joy unlike anything I had ever experienced in all of my years attending church services, participating in religious activities, etc. I came to understand later that this was the joy of which Jesus spoke in John 15 that results from the fruit that is produced when a branch has a right relationship to the vine. I inherently knew that day that I had done nothing, but that Jesus had worked through me! I knew without a doubt that I would never be satisfied in my life unless I could maintain a relationship with Jesus that would enable the fruit and the joy that comes with it to be continually present in my daily life.

Oh, how wonderful and awesome it is to simply know Him! The seven Midshipmen who were baptized and received the Holy Ghost over the next one and a half years were God's gracious confirmation to me of the validity of His Word and the truth that it contains, a truth I so passionately love to this day.

LEAVING BEHIND BEING PENTECOSTAL AND BECOMING AN APOSTOLIC.

At the time that I prayed the prayer recorded above, I did not have the depth of understanding of spiritual things to be able to comprehend that my life would never be the same from that day forward. I did not know that this prayer was the beginning of a quest to know God both through His Word and through His Spirit, a quest which would continue to this very day and which I expect to continue until my departure from this life. Looking back on that time, I see that I went to the Naval Academy as a third generation Pentecostal; I left four years later, however, as a FIRST GENERATION APOSTOLIC. Both truth and the God of truth were genuinely mine for the first time in my life!

One week before I graduated from the Academy, I was visiting the Wednesday night service in Dover. Sis. Janet Trout had just returned from Israel. She preached a powerful message about the nearness of the coming of the Lord. I was not frightened by the message, but I was definitely and deeply moved by it. I knelt at the altar and laid over it in an almost prostrate position. My resistance to God's plans for my future began to crumble. I began to weep and call out to God to let me preach NOW!

In order to attend the U.S. Naval Academy, I had to agree to serve for five years after graduation. There was no honorable way out of this commitment. Even though our country was involved in Vietnam at that time, I was NOT going to plead "conscientious objector" status after having benefited from a four year college education at the government's expense. Therefore, to be able to preach immediately would require a miracle of God.

For a long time at the altar there in Dover, I begged God to let me work for Him NOW! Eventually I begin to feel a sense of peace come over me. While the Lord did not speak directly to my spirit, He did speak to me in a totally unexpected way. As I continued to kneel, a hush settled over those who had been praying. A lady standing somewhere behind me (I do not know to this day who it was) began to give a message through the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation of tongues. The main portion of the message was: "I the Lord have heard your prayer and the cry of your heart. I will indeed use you now. I will lead you and use you to do a great work for me." Needless to say, I was stunned! God had publicly spoken to me. Even the people who were standing around told me later that they knew that I was the one to whom God was speaking.

FINDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS.

The Navy granted me 60 days of leave after graduation before I was to report for flight training in Pensacola, Florida. I was so starved for fellowship with God's people that I found some place to go to service every night of the week for all 60 of those days. I loved being around God's people again. I loved being in the house of God. I no longer had just a relationship with the Church; I had the beginnings of a real relationship with God.

About 3 weeks after graduation, I was asked to preach a "Youth Rally" in the Church that had been started originally in my Grandmother's living room. The title of my message that night was "I am a fool for Christ, whose fool are you?" I was asked to preach in several different churches during the remainder of my 60 days of leave.

When I prayed about which church to attend during flight training, I felt that the Lord had directed me to help out in a small new church which was very near to the Naval Air Station. Bro. Homer Thomas had not been saved but for five years. He had an eighth grade education and had been a notorious bouncer in many of the bars of Pensacola before his salvation. But, He loved God! He was supporting his ministry to his new church by working as a mailman. Every morning he would get up and pray two to three hours before work. God was using Him mightily, and he had a contagious passion for God and a burden to see the lost saved. While I attended his church, he lived as hard for God as he had for the devil.

He had a "new" doctrine that I had never personally heard preached in Pentecost before that time. He taught that you should pray in tongues some everyday. He stated that he never left his house in the morning before he had spoken in tongues. At first this was not a welcomed idea to me, because I still spoke in tongues infrequently. However, I went back to the Word of God and studied the benefits of praying in tongues. I was amazed to see that the Scriptures taught very specifically about the tremendous and desirable blessings that came to a person who was this yielded to God in his daily prayer life. Again, while I had never heard this "doctrine" before, I found the principles of it clearly taught in the Word of God; so, I changed my belief and my practice to conform to the Word.

Being single at the time and having just started the class portion of flight school, I was determined to spend as much time at the church as I could in seeking God for this liberty in His Spirit. For more than two weeks I prayed in the church by myself, once before class in the mornings and again after work. During lunch break I went to the base chapel and prayed instead of eating. I wanted everything that God had for me. I knew that the Lord had led me to attend this church, so I believed that this must be something that God wanted to do in my life.

Due to my ten years of experience with the "traditional" Pentecostal approach to the Holy Ghost and tongues, it was extremely difficult for me to break through, past the resistance of my flesh. However, as I spent time with God, my spirit began to thirst more and more for Him. I slowly began to be able to yield more and more easily to God's Spirit. After about a week of this intense prayer, it became so easy to speak in tongues that the adversary told me that I was just making up sounds. But, the sweet voice of God gently spoke to me and said, "Ask him how you can be making up the words when all of the focus of your mind is on listening to what you are saying." Immediately it was as though the sun had broken through the clouds and shined a bright light of understanding, followed then by liberty and joy. Why? Because I understood that it would have taken all of my mental faculties to have simply "made up" the tremendous diversity of sounds which were coming out of my mouth. Astoundingly they did not sound to me like "gibberish" at all; it actually sounded like a real language. Having traveled by this time to several foreign countries, and having studied French in both high school and college, I knew what a foreign language typically sounded like.

After receiving this understanding from the Lord, I spent as much of my prayer time speaking in tongues as I was allowed to by the Lord. I figured that if Paul, the most powerful Apostle in the New Testament, had said that He spoke “with tongues more than” all of the Corinthian Church (1 Corinthians 14:18), he then had to be a good example to follow (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1). So, follow I did; and still do.

If there had been any doubt in my mind about the validity of what I was experiencing, it was soon to be removed. A short while after the two weeks of prayer and the liberty in the Spirit I had received, I stopped by to visit my Dad, who was still a sinner at that time. When he opened the door at my knock, a strange look came over his face. While he continued to stand in the opened door and while I still stood on his front porch, he asked me, “What’s happened to you?” I was stunned! I did not know what he was talking about, so I said, “I don’t know, what do you mean?” He said to me, “Something has happened to you. You don’t look the same.” I said to him again, “What do you mean?” He said, “There is a glow on your face that has never been there before. What has happened to you?” My mind was blank at first; I said, “I don’t know anything that has happened to me” (thinking that it was something natural not supernatural). Then suddenly I remembered what I had been doing for the last two weeks. I told him about the prayer and my new liberty in speaking in tongues. His reply was, “Well I don’t know if that was it, but if it is, don’t stop doing it because I have never seen you look like this before.”

Later on I realized that I finally had the same “glow” on my face as the one I had seen on Bro. Marvin Cole’s face over 4 years before. While I would continue to seek God and to desire to know Him more and more, I understood that I truly was on the pathway to relationship with Jesus.

A DOOR OPENING TO MINISTRY AND CLOSING ON A LONG-DESIRED CAREER.

I asked Bro. Thomas’ Church to pray with me that somehow God would get me out of the Navy so that I could preach immediately. Meanwhile I led services, did visitation, and preached enough to qualify to apply for my local license. On November 1, 1968, I was married to the woman God had chosen for me before I was born. On November 14, 1968, I met the Florida District Board of the UPCI and was granted my “Local” ministerial license.

On the morning of December 4, 1968, I woke up with tremendous pain in my back between my spine and my right shoulder blade. Three days later I was diagnosed with “right-winged scapula,” a paralysis of the muscle group that controls the shoulder blade. The fight program placed me on inactive status and I was grounded. The Navy kept me on limited duty for a year.

On December 1, 1969, the Navy medically retired me after a medical examination board determined that the condition was permanent. I was now a full time preacher! God had performed a miracle. My handicap was not a condition that would hinder my ability to minister. Since I would be receiving a disability retirement check every month, I was able to preach for several small churches as an evangelist and partially support my family while beginning a brand new church. Where? God sent me to (of all places) Annapolis, Maryland!

Over the years the Lord has been more faithful and persistent in pursuing me than I have been in pursuing Him. Yet, my passion for Him continues unabated and undiminished even now during my 62nd year of life. To this day, I want Him and want to know Him more than anything else in this world. To this day, my first and foremost commitment is to His Word, and not to the opinions and teachings of men. To this day the most important thing in my life is “to know Him.”

Hebrews 11:1-6

1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

2 For by it the elders obtained a good report.

3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

5 By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

AGAIN, THANKS FOR READING THIS ARTICLE.

I realize that your time is valuable. It is an honor and quite humbling that you would invest your time in reading something that I have written. Ultimately, I confess that your willingness to do so must undoubtedly be a result of the work of the Holy Ghost in your life and mine. I pray earnestly that I have been faithful to God in accurately communicating the thoughts He has given me with a spirit and attitude pleasing to Him.

Finally, I hope that you have concluded from reading the narrative that, first and foremost, I am a student of the Word. As a student, I strive to listen to the Word and to NOT be a manipulator of the Word. I study to know and understand, not to have something to preach. I study to find the answer to my own questions, not just to be able to answer someone else's. My teaching and ministry are only a by-product of my desire to know God by and through His Word.

As a result, I am also teachable. I can be persuaded to change my position! But, I am not swayed or persuaded by un-supported opinions, traditionally held positions, name-calling, or threats of being ostracized. Bring me your Scriptures and I will listen, and then I will go back to the Bible and study them. If I believe you have brought me to a new understanding of the Word through the Scriptures which you have presented to me, you have my pledge: I WILL CHANGE MY POSITION to reflect what the Word of God is telling me. Therefore, I ask nothing more from you dear reader. I want no one to take MY WORD for anything; I want you to take HIS WORD! Let's study the Word to find out what God is saying to us, not just to find some Scripture that appears to support what we believe. God speed you in your search! We should fellowship as brothers; not just because of the commonality of our origin, but also because of the common ground of relationship in that same brotherhood, which is our mutual search for God and His Truth! HE IS PLEASED BY THOSE WHO SEARCH FOR HIM!

cmwright