MILEPOSTS

Steps and Stops in the Life of One of God’s Children

Charles G. Thornton
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Dedication

This volume is dedicated to my good wife, Janice, and our six children, whose support and commitment have greatly encouraged me to seek to continue walking faithfully with our precious Lord.

“Thank you, my dear family.”
Preface

Let me explain why I’m writing this book. First, Rebekah told me to do it. Next, I wanted to. Finally, and most importantly, I think this is one way I can do what I read in Psalm 78:

“…he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.”

This book exists for the simple purpose of reminding you, my family, of the great God Whom we have the privilege of serving. I desire that you, and anyone else who may look ‘over your shoulders,’ will be encouraged to “set (your) hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments.”

The song writer put it this way:

“O, for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer’s praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The wonders of His grace.”

I hope my pen can do what my tongue has limitations in doing…hold before you the delight of following and serving God to the best of your ability.

With my love,
Dad
Introduction

*The MILEPOST®* is a travel magazine devoted to assisting people as they journey from “Outside” (one of the designations Alaskan people have given the 48 contiguous states of the USA) to Alaska. In this travel aid we find a great variety of information: maps, distances, places of lodging, and restaurants; points of interest for sight-seeing, as well as general information concerning the (Canadian) Territory or State through which one is traveling.

*Mileposts* is similar. It serves as a reminder of the starts, stops, detours, areas explored, and vistas seen during the life of this traveler…one who is seeking to “follow” Jesus Christ.

There is one significant way in which *Mileposts* differs from *The MILEPOST®*. The means of measurement in *The MILEPOST®* is either miles or kilometers and, at any point, one knows how far he has come and how far he still has to go to reach his destination. *Mileposts*, on the other hand, while giving some indication of how far its subject has come, is incapable of indicating how far (or how long) the future journey is yet to be.

Is it complete? “Not yet.” (An Old Timer in Vermont, when asked if he had “lived here all his life,” is reported to have made that same reply.)

Is it exhaustive? No…How does one compress a lifetime into “X” number of printed pages? Is it exhausting? Only the one who reads will be able to answer that question.

Does it accomplish its intended purpose? That answer also is to be determined by the reader. You alone can determine whether this “poor lisping, stammering tongue (pen?)” has expressed well the glory due to the Savior Who said (to this writer): “Follow me…”

I invite you to walk with me as I reflect on the various Mileposts that mark my journey as a follower of Jesus, the Christ of God.

Charles G. Thornton
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MILEPOST #1

Kaibara, Japan
Chapter 1

Born into a “Military” Family

I may never march in the infantry,
Ride in the cavalry, shoot the artillery.
I may never fly o’er the enemy,
But I’m in the Lord’s army.

The number of children of military parents who choose a military career is not known. Nor do we have statistics of the number of sons of preachers who become preachers. In my family, the emphasis was placed, not on becoming a pastor or missionary “because the Thorntons have always done it,” but rather to discover what would please God and do it.

That did not alter the fact that there are preachers listed in the last six Thornton generations. In my own generation, my cousin, Paul Eckel and I share this privilege to be called of God to serve as pastors. My brother, Sam (named after my father, Samuel Watson) is a farmer. In our upbringing, neither occupation was considered less ‘spiritual’ or significant than the other. “Doing the will of God from the heart”\(^1\) is the most important thing any of us can do.

While the details of military service by family members are not essential to my story, they are still of interest to me:

My great grandfather (S.W. Thornton, D.D.) served in the army during the Civil War. This was prior to his pastoral ministry. My great uncle Earle was a major during the Spanish-American War. My Uncle David served in the US Navy during WWII.

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<td>As a boy, I used Uncle Earl’s old McClellan saddle for riding. I was also proud owner of a pair of his riding boots.</td>
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During the Korean War, my brother, Sam, served on active duty for six months, then inactive duty for three years. John was stationed on Okinawa for one of his two years in the
Army. My sister, Cathy, was an air traffic controller during her time of service in the Navy. My army involvement will be related later.

My brother John’s sons, Matt and Aaron served; Matt from 1992-94 in the army infantry, while Aaron was a marine who traveled to Guam, Russia, Japan, Okinawa, and several other places. My sister Martha’s son, Curt, did 3 years in regular army, a portion of it in Honduras. One of our granddaughters, Rachel, served in the Air Force in Afghanistan during the early 2000s.

What does this mean? Perhaps very little, but I prefer to believe that we all endeavored to contribute our portion of time and energy to help preserve the safety and ideals of the United States of America in which we live.

“Why are you talking about military families when the Thorntons pretty clearly aren’t?” I’m glad you asked. I’ve been trying to get to the real point – some families seem to have almost a familial “bent” toward serving the Lord. I don’t mean that we serve the Lord “because all Thorntons do.” I mean, the idea of serving seems easier because we have seen other family members doing so. My privilege and joy has been to have grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles and all my siblings modeling lives of service to God.

So when God called me to serve him vocationally – a sixth generation preacher – it was an easy yes!
Chapter 2

From Japan to America

I was born ‘at a very early age’ (as some wit stated it) in Kaibara, Japan. Why Japan? Another wit gave as good an answer as I can think of: "I wanted to be near my mother." Actually my parents had moved to Japan in 1930 for missionary service. That was not altogether a novel move, since my father had lived a considerable portion of his early life in Japan. In fact, prior to beginning missionary service in Japan, he had lived outside the USA some 15 years (both in India and Japan).

Furthermore, my father was simply living out the result of a battle he had with God while in Blackburn High School and Junior College. That battle was over the issue of control (was Watson or God in control of his life?)…God won!

My mother told me that, as a baby, I had some difficulties with my feet. It became necessary to bind them in order to help them grow properly. The possibility of my having trouble walking was fearful. “Then,” she said, “God graciously gave me a verse of Scripture that served to bring me hope. It was Habakkuk 3:19: ‘He will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.’” I learned about this some time after I began participating in basketball, high jump and the mile run in high school. (Little did she realize the example she set for me by her simple acceptance of God’s Word as a basis for faith and practice.)

My recollections of life in Japan are only those which were told me. As a young boy I once ‘ran away’ from home on a tricycle. I assume this wayward boy made it to approximately the end of the street, and only until supper time. I have been told that, when we returned to the United States, all of us children spoke primarily Japanese, although we understood English.

It was at the end of 1936 that we moved “back home.” On board ship all of us children contracted measles. Upon arrival in San Francisco, we were quarantined until we were well enough to travel on to St. Louis where, just after Christmas, we completed
our journey. There the Frank Widbin family graciously invited us to stay with them in their home. Despite the fact that we invaded their “space,” the three Widbin sons; Frank, Jr., Bill and Bob, took us into their hearts and treated us five Thornton children with loving care. For a short time we were their “little siblings.”

**Snippets**

In September, 1953, I had the privilege of seeing Bill and Mary Widbin as they took ship from Hoboken, New Jersey. They were bound for Holland on the first leg of their journey to Dutch New Guinea as missionaries. At Dad’s memorial service in 1994 Bob Widbin shared his memories of my father.

During 1937 we made yet another move. This one was to a farm some 100 miles southwest of St. Louis. My grandfather had dreamed of a “Self Help Bible School,” patterned after the one in which he taught while in Japan. Others in Hope Church of St. Louis (where Grandpa was pastor) caught the vision and soon the 430 acre farm became the facility for the school. Dad was to be its director. He would also oversee the work on the farm. Isn’t it interesting how God works? The man, who had wrestled with God over preaching versus farming, was now both preaching and farming. This was to become our home for the next eight years.

The Tadmor Self Help Bible School had a short-lived history – only two years, due to the advent of World War II. But, during that brief time the lives of three of its students were impacted for God and His work in a significant way.

During that time places like Asher Hollow, Benton Creek, Cook Station, Yeary, Daniels, and Wesco (locations of one room country schoolhouses) were spoken of at our dinner table. Three of them we children attended. All of them were locations in my father’s ministry of the Gospel.

But Tadmor (the name came from one of Solomon’s store cities “in the wilderness”\(^2\)) was a farm, a school location, a place for the people of Hope Church to come for an annual Labor Day Bible Conference, and home to the growing Thornton family.
MILEPOST #2

Missouri - Childhood
Chapter 3

The Geography of a Life

When our Lord directed us to “occupy ‘til I come,” He didn’t indicate the exact location of that occupation. Even so, He reserves the authoritative right to assign His servants to any place he decrees – whether one or many, during their years of ministry.

Even so, it has seemed good to my Lord to direct my life and ministry in a number of places. The following maps are intended to indicate the broad geographical aspects of my life.

Tadmor and Environs

My boyhood days were spent in a part of Crawford County, Missouri where Benton Creek runs into the Meramec River. Tadmor is the name of the 430 acre farm that was my home.
Locations of a Life

0 – Japan  Birth - Age 4 – Kaibara (1933-37)
1 – Missouri  Ages 4-16 – Tadmor (1937-49, 53-54)
2 – Tennessee  College – Dayton (1949-53)
4 – Ohio  Marriage – Mansfield (1956)
5 – Indiana  Seminary – Winona Lake (1956-59)
4 – Ohio  1st Church – Galion (1960-63)
6 – Virginia  2nd Church – Buena Vista (1963-68)
7 – Maryland  3rd Church – Washington / Lanham (1968-75)
8 – Michigan  4th Church – Lansing (1975-78)
9 – Washington  5th Church – Sunnyside (1978-83)
10 – Iowa  6th Church – Dallas Center (1983-87)
11 – Ohio  7th Church – Millersburg (1987-96)
12 – Alaska  8th Church – Soldotna (1996 --)
Chapter 4

Elementary School - Grades 1-4

During the first four years of Elementary School I attended Benton Creek School, which was located 1 ½ miles south of our home. The twins (Ruth and Alice) were one year ahead of me, while Elsie and Martha followed me at one year intervals. I carry a number of clear memories from the days I attended Benton Creek School.

One memory is of the 1 ½ mile walk to and from school each day. In early fall or late spring, the walk was often hot. The Riefenstahls lived about half way to the school. Just behind their house was their well, with a windlass by which they drew water. Mrs. Riefenstahl would let us draw water, empty it into a bucket, and then enjoy the coolness and refreshment it provided. In the cold of winter, she often had hot chocolate for us as we warmed ourselves before the fire in the living room.

Another memory is of Mr. Kammerer, who came to our school each week to teach the Bible. We sang, memorized verses and then listened as he taught us from God’s Word. (Clearly those were not the politically correct days of today).

Yet another memory involves Miss Brenda, our teacher. (Her last name I never did get ‘nailed down’ in my memory. After all, there was only one Miss Brenda, and she was my teacher.) About 200 yards from the school house, as we started toward home, there was a cut in the side of the hill for the road. On the opposite side from the hill was Benton Creek, which, at that point, ran about 15-18 feet below the road. And that was the problem. What a place to slide! The older kids did it. Why shouldn’t I try? But it was so high (or far down, depending on one’s perspective)! Still, Charlie did it!

Then…the time of reckoning came. Miss Brenda came to the spot. She “dressed us down real good.” She then proceeded to spank me with a foot ruler she “just happened” to have with her. I do not recall crying (after all, I was 6 or 7 years old). I did learn again the lesson of obedience to authority.
There was also the time, when Benton Creek flooded and overflowed its banks (one of its annual rampages), that Dad took us to school in a horse-drawn wagon. In some places the water was almost to the axle of the wagon, while the horses splashed along their way. And this was after a new road had been built. The former road had actually forded the Creek at three points when we first moved to Tadmor. Finally, after a hog-trough bridge was built across the creek at Benton Creek Schoolhouse, and after the new road was built that ran across our farm rather that alongside it; then we had only the one ford on our property.

Perhaps the most long-lasting memory is of the time one of the men from Grandpa’s church in St. Louis was visiting Tadmor. (I think his name was Mr. Campbell.) During this visit he gave me...me (Charlie Thornton) a small hammer. In those days I was thrilled to have any kind of tool to “work” with. But there is more. Mr. Campbell told me that if I took good care of the hammer until he returned to Tadmor again, he would give me a set of tools. Boy! Was that ever great! I could get a whole set of tools to go with my new hammer! What a thrill for this seven year old boy!

Then Mr. Campbell went home...back to St. Louis, and Charlie did two things – he used his hammer, and he took care of his hammer. He did not want to either break it or lose it. If he did either of those things, he would not get his promised set of tools.

Finally Mr. Campbell came back to Tadmor from St. Louis. As he greeted and then visited with my daddy, while walking around and looking over the state of things at the farm, I made certain that I was around...with my “well kept, and not lost” hammer very much in evidence. But Mr. Campbell never noticed me or my hammer. I was pretty shy about breaking into the conversation of adults (I had been taught very well by my parents), so I never said anything.

Eventually Mr. Campbell went back home. I felt that he had forgotten all about his promise, or (and worse yet, for this little boy) he had lied about giving me a set of tools. My ‘little boy’ mind immediately went to the second explanation, but the
longer I live, I am becoming more and more convinced that he had forgotten his promise. Why do I say that? Because I am all too prone to forget things I have committed in good faith to do. Boy, am I ever glad that my heavenly Father doesn’t have memory lapses!

My final reported memory (there are others) relates to the time I gave a 4-H Club demonstration at school. After much help from my father, I showed the ‘gathered throng’ (parents who had come to encourage their children) how to store potatoes, carrots, and other root vegetables in the earth. Dig a hole, line it with straw, be certain the stored items are clean and dry, place in hole, cover with straw, cover with earth, and you have it done. That was my first ever endeavor to do something before others. (Do you suppose that God was beginning His process of preparing me for a life of ministry in which I would be communicating His Word to others?)

After completing grade four at Benton Creek School, that school was closed and we were transported to Cook Station for my fifth year.

Snippets
There was a spring not far below the crossing (“ford”) of Benton Creek at Tadmor. On the hottest days of summer, I would go to it, cast myself down on my stomach, and drink deeply. What a consistently cool, refreshing drink! I was never disappointed. In later years I thought of that spring when I read the scripture that states: “…from his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38 - NASB). There have been times when I have been far from Missouri, on particularly hot, dry days, when I have imagined lying beside that spring, and drinking to my heart’s content.
Chapter 5

Elementary School – Grades 5-8

What does a boy do, when he lives on a farm 14 miles from town, with his four closest siblings all sisters? He reads a lot. He does a lot of things alone. He often lives in a world of his own imagination, prompted by his reading. “The X Bar X Boys,” Edgar Rice Burroughs’ books about “Tarzan of the Apes,” and Zane Grey’s books of frontier adventure were part of my literary diet. The first book I remember receiving as a gift was from my Grandmother Gash – “Black Beauty.” Other early books were “Ladd of Sunnybank,” “Tom Sawyer,” “Treasure Island,” and “Genghis Khan.”

I wasn’t Jim Hawkins or Huckleberry Finn but, in my fertile mind, I could be Superman (along with a towel I safety-pinned around my neck), or the Lone Ranger or…

Can you imagine my surprise and delight, when I ‘discovered’ that “Deathwind” (Zane Grey’s famous Indian fighter), actually lived in Ohio? Yes, Lewis Wetzel was a genuine frontiersman. I learned that fact when I moved to Ohio to become a pastor in the early 1960s. The burning of the Moravian church at Massanutton, with recently converted Indians locked inside, was a true incident in American History. However, long before I learned that fact, I had roamed the woods, hills, valleys and waterways of our farm (the Meramec River flowed along the north side of Tadmor, and Benton Creek flowed through the farm), all the while imagining I was a noted Indian fighter and scout.

“Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.” Francis Bacon said it so well. Whether it was sitting in the living room, while Dad read to the family, checking books out of the St. James library for my own interests, or devouring books I received as gifts, the printed word was a significant part of my early years.

The Boy’s Life Magazine (which I received for several years as a lad) opened up dreams and vistas that I longed to
pursue. Then I became proud owner of a Boy Scout Handbook. Wow! What a treat!

However, living 14 miles from town presented a major problem. How could I belong to a Scout troop when I lived so far from the closest one? Then…I discovered that there were such things as “Lone Scouts.” Boys who lived too far from a troop to participate could be actual recognized Scouts.

Maybe that was my niche. Still there was another complication – money. Here the specter of fees, costs for uniforms, and such expenses raised its ugly head. I had no money. I had come to realize that my parents had little enough, especially for unnecessary things. (This definitely fit the ‘unnecessary’ category.) So … I decided that I would study the Handbook and endeavor to learn what I could from it. Perhaps I could not be a Boy Scout in name, yet I would be a Scout in activity, attitude and aspirations. It wasn’t until sometime later that I realized that I was doing on the farm what many Scouts were learning in the world of Scouting.

Beginning in the fall of 1942, Benton Creek School was closed (it burned to the ground a few years later), and we were transported to Cook Station. By today’s standards, our lives were in imminent danger of being “snuffed out,” because the old panel truck in which we rode had no muffler, and fumes came into the seating area through the floorboards. It also had no windows, but then the body itself was not so ‘tight’ that fresh air was unable to get in. At the latest report (I’m recording this in the spring of 2007), I survived the ‘harrowing’ experience.

My most outstanding memory of that year is how amazed I was at the “Weldwood Glue” sample I saw in the Cook Station General Store. The promise made by Weldwood was that “the wood will break before the glue joint will.”

The following year (1943) we were transported to yet another school – Wesco. Our teacher was Mrs. Jake Barnacle (Miss Helen, to us youngsters). There I entered the seventh grade. And that is how I can honestly state that I have not received a fifth grade education.
You may well ask: “How can these things be?” (My sincere apologies are due to Nicodemus.) It was a common practice for the teacher in a one-room school to teach six grades each year. Grades one through four were regulars. Grades five and seven would be taught one year, while grades six and eight were taught the next year. In 1942, the teacher at Cook Station taught grades six and eight. This placed me in the same class as the Twins (my older sisters). Somehow, in the move to Wesco the following year, some confusion arose, and I was moved ahead with my sisters.

I recall Mr. Jensen, a short, rotund, energetic man who was the Bible teacher. He used flannelgraph. On one occasion I watched with amazement as he washed Naaman seven times in the Jordan River. With the aid of a rubber band attached to Naaman’s head and a string attached to his feet, plus a slit in the “waters of the Jordan,” he pulled Naaman down into the water and let the rubber band pull him back up again. Seven times he did this, while we children watched with amazement. The lesson? We, too, should do exactly as God directs us to do.

At Wesco, two things stand out in my mind. The first was the discovery of an old bookcase down in the basement that contained a number of Edgar Rice Burroughs books about Tarzan. The second was the time Miss Helen took our class across the road to her home where her husband, Jake, was working on his car. Jake proceeded to show us and explain to us a number of the fundamentals of automobiles and how they worked. That (by the way) constituted the entirety of my education in auto mechanics.

Dorothy Clark was a co-director of Camp Tadmor, where I attended as a boy. She loved the outdoors, and had a special delight in birds. She could whistle their songs, and had learned a great deal about their habits. Whether it was during an early morning ‘bird walk,’ the standard afternoon swim in the Meramec River, or a devotional time at either the daily chapel or the nightly Campfire service, Dorothy always showed a consistency of life and love for Jesus Christ.
This was demonstrated even more vividly when she went to Africa as a missionary for some forty years. I wondered how she could devote that long a time to live among a people where, I understand, it was considered ‘improper’ for a woman to whistle. I feel that Dorothy always has had a song in her heart that no custom or edict of man could ever still. Upon reflection, I am confident that her love for her Savior made anything we might consider to be a sacrifice simply another matter that isn’t of primary significance.

These things have challenged me to have a melody in my own heart that comes from and is directed to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, even as Dorothy had.

Paul Mellow was born in China to missionary parents. He lived and worked at Tadmor (a Christian camp and conference facility in southern Missouri) when I was a young boy. Paul had a passion to serve God. This passion revealed itself through his opportunity to serve Christ by teaching Bible in the public schools throughout Crawford County. Paul walked from school to school in order to do this special ministry.

Paul was the director when I first worked at Tadmor as a counselor and lifeguard. I observed his style of leadership and methods of working with the youth and children. This provided a foundation for later serving and directing both in youth ministries and camps for some thirty years.
Chapter 6

“Meanwhile, Back at the (Farm)”

Life on the farm was not all play and reading. We Thornton children early learned what the word “chores” meant. One seemingly never-ending chore was keeping the wood box full, so our mother could do the cooking. Our wood-burning stove also served to heat the water in the container located at one end.

Now, no self-respecting boy ever wants to do that job. Eventually it would be accomplished, but only after much “encouragement” by my parents. With one grand exception! And therein hangs a tale…

Uncle Earle and Aunt Nell would come to visit – usually along with Grandpa and Grandma. When we children received the news of his coming, we knew…we knew what was coming! Uncle Earle had developed a habit of bringing some very special “medicine pills” along to dispense to us children. (Of course these were nothing but candy, but we children loved the charade.)

On one occasion, when I was in the midst of the daily chore of filling the wood box, who should arrive but Uncle Earle? He quickly sized up the situation. (One does not become a Major in the U.S. Army without the ability to ‘size up the situation.’) Then he said: “Let’s fill the wood box.” Immediately I was on the job, along with some very willing siblings. We were helping Uncle Earle fill the wood box! I filled my arms and staggered into the kitchen with several loads of wood. Afterwards (following the distribution of the “medicine” to all of us children) I thought - Uncle Earle had not carried much wood himself! Just the thought of doing something with him had inspired us to do what we should have been doing anyway.

One responsibility that was passed along to younger siblings as time went by, was feeding the chickens. The main chicken house was close to the “Big House” (a fourteen room, two-story house that served as the center for the annual conference, as well as the summer camps that were conducted by
Hope Church). Each evening, upon collecting the eggs, I took them to the fruit cellar for storage. That was fine, until Junior Girl’s Camp time. I entered the fruit cellar by going through the enclosed porch that served as the dining hall for the camp. And it was just at supper time! The girls all (well, it seemed that way) stared at me…and I was embarrassed. Walk into the porch, open the cellar door, take the eggs down, put them away, come back up the steps, close the cellar door, and get out of there! (Boy, that was more embarrassing than calling “man on the floor,” at Bryan College, whenever I had to get trash from the girl’s dormitory.)

Snippets
Often, in my service for God, I dillydally along, thinking: “How boring this job is.” If only I realized that I get to participate “with my Savior” in an eternally significant job, wouldn’t I get as excited about it as I did with helping Uncle Earle carry wood?

I also had my turn assisting Dad with milking the cows. Each morning and evening we would take a ten-gallon milk can, plus a couple of buckets, to the barn for milking. I worked at it, but Dad could milk about two cows to my one. Sitting on a one-legged stool, watching for the ever-possible, cocklebur-laden tail to swat me, and making certain that the cow didn’t kick the bucket over with a restless movement (remember old Ma Leary’s famous cow?) were all part of the job. It was worth it when the Junior Campers came to watch us. We would tell them to “pump the cow’s tail so the milk would come.” And, sure enough, it would – with a little assistance from the milkmaid or boy.

Once, while on a visit to St. Louis, we went shopping at the Famous Barr Department Store. This was a huge store – it completely filled a city block and was several stories tall. I became so interested in something or other that I became lost. Soon a nice man took me to the Lost and Found Department. There I sat, surrounded by packages, umbrellas, coats and other such lost articles. I sat…waiting…waiting for someone to find me. Somebody announced over the loudspeaker that there was a
little boy, named Charlie, who was in the Lost and Found Department. From where I sat, I could see straight down the aisle of the room, through the door, and down a long store aisle where people were shopping.

Suddenly I saw my Daddy! He was coming down the aisle toward the room where I was sitting. Now, my Daddy was real tall. Somebody told me he was six feet three inches tall. (I could only count two feet, but then, what does a little boy know?) At least I could see his head taller than anybody else in that aisle. He came to the room where I was, and took me back to the rest of our family. Boy! Was I ever glad to see him!

When I was about 7 years old, my Daddy taught me to swim. (Actually he taught all us Thornton children.) Swimming in the Meramec River or Benton Creek was so much fun, especially if I tried to swim from the Little Rock to the Big Rock in the river. I soon did that. Then I worked a bigger goal: to swim underwater from the Little Rock to the Big Rock. That was fun! Maybe the best was when I learned to dive off the Big Rock.

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**Snippets**

A lesson comes from winter mornings, when a lantern was essential for light to milk by. Dad would carry the lantern to the barn. I soon discovered that I would be walking in darkness if I did not stay close to the one carrying the light. No wonder I sometimes find the light dim in my walk with Jesus. I have run ahead or lagged behind. How refreshing to get close again and thus see better.

Driving the team while disk ing or harrowing newly plowed ground, or while loading hay on the wagon, or cultivating corn in the field were all jobs I liked. After we got a tractor, Sam, my brother, fell in love with anything that was propelled by an engine. I think that’s one reason he became a farmer.

When I was about 9 years old I recall threshing time. When the threshing machine came to our farm, men from the surrounding area gathered to help thresh. Wheat, oats or barley had to be cut and bundled. Thanks to Silas McCormick, his
invention cut, bundled and tied the grain in one smooth operation. The bundles were then “shocked.” Wagons were then loaded and driven to the threshing machine, where the bundles were thrown into its ever hungry “maw.” Straw was blown out one end onto the straw stack, while the clean grain poured out of a special spout into gunny sacks. And “Charlie” got to hold the sacks. Boy! That was really great!

One incident I recall involved the noon meal at threshing time. We (notice how I ‘snuck’ myself into the group) were seated at the table in our dining room. Elmer Collier was seated at the opposite end from where my mother was serving us. He said: “Mary, may I have a biscuit?” Whereupon Mom (without thinking) picked up a biscuit and threw it to him. I think it surprised her that she did that. It surprised me that she threw it straight. We all laughed.
Chapter 7

A New Life for Charlie

In the spring of 1945 three earth-shattering events transpired on the same day (April 12th, to be more precise). President Franklin D. Roosevelt died, the Meramec River flooded, and (Ta-Dah!) Charlie Thornton graduated from the 8th Grade of Wesco School. In the grand scheme of American history, the flood and the graduation will never carry the same weight or recognition of the death of the President, but it was a significant thing for Charlie. Actually I graduated third in the class...an item of distinction. That is, until one realizes that there were only three students in the class, the other two being Ruth and Alice, my sisters. But, as the song goes: “That’s how things is down here...”

That summer became a turning point in my life. Although I had heard the message of God’s love through the Gospel all my life, it wasn’t until 1945 (at age 12) that I placed my trust in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior from sin. It was during my father’s absence (to explore the possibility of ministering among the Japanese population of Denver, Colorado) that God spoke to me regarding my relationship to Him.

One of my chores was to feed the chickens. During the summer time, we often let them run outside during the afternoon hours. This meant that I had to go to the chicken house after dark to shut them in again, lest a fox, weasel, or some other such animal should break into the chicken house and kill a bunch of them. On this particular evening, as I walked home from doing my duty, I well remember seeing the stars and the moon. As I marveled at them, I was reminded of how great God is. Not only that, I began thinking of my status as a sinner and also about my need of Jesus Christ as my Savior. No one else was close. I was all alone, except for the Spirit of God who revealed to me so clearly my need.

At the back gate of our farm house, I stopped. There I told Jesus that I was depending on Him to forgive my sins and give
me a home in heaven. Now, some sixty-two years later, both the fence and the gate have long since disappeared. But neither the memory of that night, nor the fact of my commitment to begin “living for Jesus a life that is true; trying to please Him in all that I do”9 have disappeared. My “New Life” had begun.

I then walked into the house and told my mother what I had done. I can assure you that she was delighted. This was one of those very few occasions when my eyes filled with tears of joy. Later, when Dad came home, I told him also. Needless to say he was pleased as well.

I desired to be baptized in testimony to my faith, but Dad felt it best for me to wait a bit. Therefore, it was two years later when he baptized me in the Meramec River at Wesco, Missouri. My mother was baptized at that time also. (She had been a Christian for years, but had never been baptized.) Elsie, my sister was to have been baptized too, but due to illness was unable to share in that special occasion at that time.

Did I sense some special blessing at that time? I can’t say that I did. I suppose that was simply another instance of having a quiet sense of joy because I was seeking to obey the will of God, as I understood it. That was the way I believe my parents walked with God – quietly going forward as they sensed His direction for them and their family.
MILEPOST #3

Missouri - Youth
Chapter 8

Secondary School

During the 1945-46 school year, my father accepted a call to teach at Faith Bible Academy (FBA), which was located on the shore of the Lake of the Ozarks at Roach, Missouri. This made it necessary for our family to move away – away from friends, school mates and neighbors.

I well remember the evening before we moved to FBA. People came from miles around to have a farewell party for our family. They brought baskets full of food. The women quickly set out dinner on tables set up by the men. The men did their usual thing – discussing the state of crops, cattle, and the war. Children ran around everywhere, simply…being children. What an occasion!

That was the night I began my introduction to high school. One of the children brought a bicycle along. What fun that was! I enjoyed taking my turn riding, along with the other kids, until I ran into, or rather, was run into by a young girl who was running from “it” in a game of tag. She hit the front wheel, while I fell forward and my upper lip hit the handlebars…hard! When I was able to recollect my thoughts, I was okay, except that my upper lip was now swollen to twice – nay, thrice – its normal size.

The world does not revolve around children (even those who are just entering the freshman year of high school). So-o-o, the next morning the Thorntons moved to Roach, Missouri. In all my ‘glory,’ I went also, with my “rooster beak.” I felt that the students must have thought I was deformed. This thought continued until a couple weeks later when my lip finally returned to normal.

I have had a life-long love of learning new things. One item that captured my mind and imagination after we moved to Faith Bible Academy in 1945 was the water supply for the school. In a small stream that flowed through the school property, there was a dam. A pipe ran from just below the waterline above
the dam and dropped steeply some 20 feet below to the stream bed. Attached was a device that looked much like a lawn sprinkler (you know – the type that ‘kicks’ itself around in a circle to emit fresh gushes of water at each pause). The difference was that each time there was a ‘squirt’ of water at the device, approximately 10% of that amount was sent up another, smaller, pipe to a tank situated above the school buildings. From there it ran by gravity down to the kitchen, bathrooms and washhouse.

As I wrote the previous paragraph, it suddenly occurred to me that there is a parallel to my spiritual life in that water supply system. God has so graciously poured out an abundance of His truth and blessings into my life. I have appropriated only a portion of all His abundance into the warp and woof of personal living. This leaves me with two thoughts: first, God’s resources are infinitely great and, second, there is always more for me to observe, explore and appropriate.

I recall one special event from FBA days – a hike to Ha Ha Tonka. That was the name of a native stone castle that had been built and then, through disuse and neglect, had fallen into ruins. Elsie and Martha (the youngest of the “Japanese” children) were along on that hike. For days they would tell some joke, and then laugh: “Ha Ha (Tonka).” Just another childhood memory, but we enjoyed those days.

My father’s teaching career at Faith Bible Academy was, however, short-lived. The Christian School education for the twins and me was also limited to one year. During the fall semester, Dad learned that the president and vice president had spoken glowingly of God’s provision, “by faith,” of a substantial amount of money, when those funds were actually a bank loan. Upon learning of this, Dad spoke to the administration of his concern. When told that this was consistent with their understanding of living “by faith in God alone,” he told them that he would complete his year’s commitment to teach, but that he could not, in good conscience before God, be associated with an organization that misrepresented (“lied”) to supporters about its basis of operation.
Following the 1945-46 school year at FBA, our family returned to Tadmor. It was during that summer that I made my first endeavor at witnessing. That the Great Commission was a serious directive to all believers, I understood well. “Preach the gospel to every creature” is not simply a neat little quotation from a nice little book for a cordial group of people. No! It is a directive from our Lord and Supreme Commander to all His followers. It places a grave responsibility upon each believer to carry out the mandate.

So-o-o, that included me as well.

But how was I to do this “thing”? Isn’t it wonderful what we can learn if we take the Word of God seriously, and literally, and act on it?

During the summer between my freshman and sophomore years in High School, I had my first ever opportunity to go roller skating. I soon discovered the purpose for the railing along the wall of the rink. I used it, too! As I was working my way hand over hand along the wall, who should I meet but another beginner. Suddenly it came to me; “here is someone to whom I should be a witness.” So, while seeking to maintain some sort of equilibrium along the wall, I asked him, “Are you a Christian?”

“No, I’m a Baptist” was the reply.

End of discussion…finished…done. I was stymied. What was I to say? I had insufficient experience with denominations to relate to that reply, and so my first try ended in ________(!), ended in ________(?), well it ended.

That fall Ruth, Alice, and I attended St. James High School. To get there, we walked one mile to our neighbor’s home to catch the bus. When the Sophomore Class met to select officers, I think the novelty of having three siblings in the same class led them to elect us president, vice president and secretary. (I was secretary, as I recall.)

It was also during that fall semester that Grandma Thornton purchased the old hotel in Wesco, Missouri. And that carries with it another story.
Initially, my grandfather handled all the family finances, including the tithing and other giving to God’s work. One day my grandmother asked Jesse (her husband – J.B. Thornton) if he would permit her to have some funds for which she was responsible. She desired to be able to respond to God’s appeals to her own heart for various Christian ministries, even as Grandpa did. So…Grandpa began giving her a sum each week for which she was responsible. From it she purchased groceries and other necessities for the home and family. She had liberty to use those funds as she saw fit. She could also tithe or give offerings as she chose.

As time passed, Grandma was able to make some wise investments that resulted in her ability to purchase the Wesco Hotel. Our family moved into that building at the end of 1946. We were only 300 yards from the bus stop now – a bus stop for a different school.

Steelville High School was to be our educational home for the rest of the Thornton family stay in Missouri.

That Christmas, we went to St. Louis to visit our grandparents. The opportunity to be in their three-story house with its “secret” stairway was always intriguing. (I remember so well how slippery the front hall was. Grandma kept a small rug on that floor, which, with hardly any “run” at all, would slide across the room.) Every meal at Grandma’s was also something special. There were always cloth napkins at every place…and…they all had napkin rings! Boy! Was that ever cool! (I must confess that I didn’t acquire the use of ‘that’ word until many years later.) Every holiday dinner was made complete by eating Grandma’s famous “Money Pudding,” which had been steamed in #2 cans, sliced into servings, and (the ultimate joy) had coins inserted. Grandma saved her silver coins (nickels, dimes, quarters…and even some half-dollars) for the pudding. Everyone got at least one coin. Some would get more than one. But if we children got a quarter, or (better yet) a half dollar, it was like winning the lottery for us.
That Christmas, Dad and Uncle Nelson, and maybe another uncle or so, took us to St. Louis University to watch a basketball tournament (high school, as I recall). I remember sitting, absolutely fascinated. This was so different from the recess play we had at Wesco. It was organized and structured. There and then I fell in love with the game. Not that I would ever be competition for George Mikan (professional basketball’s first ‘big’ man, who led Minneapolis to five national championships) or Bob Cousy, or Oscar Robertson … I just loved the sport, and wanted to play.
Chapter 9

Some High School Experiences

The two and one half years during which I attended high school at Steelville were filled with pleasant memories.

In the summer of 1947, my best friend, Rufus Beasley, and I found two boats along the Meramec River. They had both been abandoned. One was chained and locked to a tree. It had sat so long that it was waterlogged. After dragging it up on a gravel bar, we let it dry for several weeks until it was usable by twentieth century Huck Finns or Tom Sawyers. This boat we christened “The Queen Elizabeth” because of its size. The other, both smaller and lighter, was also christened – “The Queen Mary.” Since Rufus was the smaller of us, he naturally captained the QM, while I did the same for the QE. We had no oars, so we poled the boats around on the river and sloughs near Wesco.

During the summer of 1948, Rufus and I worked for his Uncle Joe, who owned a pickup hay baler. My job was that of “poker,” while Rufus was the “tier.” I poked the bailing wire though special slots in the blocks that separated the bales, while he tied the wires as the bales were about to be expelled from the baler. Since the baling was done out in the field, we often took a “break” by loading the bales on a truck, driving them to the barn and stowing them therein. Since I was the bigger of us, guess who had the privilege of throwing bales (some weighing as much as 100-110 pounds) up on the truck – three bales high? Yep! You guessed it.

Earlier I mentioned that I became interested in sports. During my junior year, I was a member of the “Wiggletails” team in our Physical Education class. (Two of the other teams were called Beanpoles and Ridge Runners.) At an annual game between Steelville and Cherryville, a neighboring high school, our JV Team coach substituted the Wiggletails into the game. I’ll never forget the thrill of making my first ever points in a “for real” game – left-handed, no less. The next year, as a senior, I
was selected to be on the eight member traveling squad of the Varsity team.

In addition to basketball, I also tried out for track. When I tried to run, I quickly discovered that the dashes simply were not for me. I could only run a 100 yard dash in about 18 seconds – not good at all. I did try out for the high jump, with some degree of success. I endeavored to do the mile run as well.

I recall the primary track meet in which I was entered. Immediately after running the mile, I was called to high jump. That was not good.

Although I never considered myself to be a thespian, I was able to participate in two plays at Steelville High School. I was Archibald Perry, Rector of the Parish, in “Tea Toper Tavern,” during my Junior (1947-1948) year. Then, as a senior, I was cast as an old Mexican, in “Marcheta.” To this day, the words and tune of “Marcheta” occasionally run through my mind, even though it was J.G. Brown who sang the song and played the lead male part.

This reminds me…for two years J.G. Brown sang bass in the male quartet in which I sang baritone. Bob and Dick, the Key twins, sang 1st and 2nd tenor. (I thought it was pretty special that the Key twins sang regularly on Radio Station KTTR [“Keep Tuned To Rolla”]. They also played guitar and mandolin.) We sang songs, such as: “Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” and “I Dream of Sweet Lorena.” This was my first experience at singing in groups other than our family or school choruses.

I should add that Ruth and Alice were involved in these plays also. It seemed that whenever music was part of some event, we Thorntons just naturally became involved. I recall that Ruth sang “Easter Bells Ringing” as a solo at a spring musical competition.

The twins and I were consistently on the Honor Roll when grades were posted. That carried with it one very enjoyable privilege – we were permitted to go on some field trips. My most
memorable trip was one to St. Louis, Missouri. There we visited a hospital. Two things were of special interest to me.

First, we were taken down to the underground passages that connected various buildings in the hospital complex. They also provided the means of supplying the buildings with the electricity, water, heat, and other things necessary to keep this “city within a city” in operation.

Then we were taken to a viewing spot above an operating room where we observed as a man’s gall stones were removed. That was fascinating…but not quite as much as what happened next. Having left the observation point, and returned to the hall outside, we stood a moment to get directions for the next stage of our visit. I suddenly recalled hearing an odd “thump.” The next moment someone was raising me up to a sitting position on the floor where I had fainted and fallen. Needless to say, I was more than a bit embarrassed. However, as the old black pastor said (when asked what his favorite Scripture was): “It came to pass.” I discovered that the great and delightful things, as well as the grim and unpleasant things generally “come to pass,” given time. After sitting on the floor with my head between my knees for a while, I rejoined the rest of the group on the tour.

One spring day I was one of the students who were allowed to fight a forest fire a few miles south of Steelville. We were driven to the site, given rakes or shovels (some were issued five gallon back pack water pumps) and put to work creating fire defense lines. Anything to get out of school for a few hours. But this also had the ring of valuable service for the good of the community as well.

When Graduation time came, I was ready. I had my first trip to the barbershop (up to that time my father had given me all my haircuts). I wore a hand-me-down suit from my Uncle David and Dad let me wear his dress shoes.

Just after school was out, the Class of ’49 went on its Senior Trip. We had worked for this. All through junior and senior years we had run the sports concession stand. Through the senior year, we raised pigs, utilizing the lunch room leftover food
to feed them. As a result, our entire class was able to share in a “trip of a lifetime.” We left Steelville on Tuesday morning for our two week trip which included Lexington, Jamestown and Williamsburg, VA; Washington, D.C. (including Mt. Vernon); Philadelphia, New York City, Boston, Niagara Falls, and Chicago. There are two special memories that come to mind:

First – in Chicago, we visited the Museum of Science and Industry. The visit to a “working” coal mine is implanted in my mind, even as the sight of the great ball hanging from a cable some four stories tall that rotated its swing to reveal the time of day on a clock face painted on the floor.

The second – also in Chicago, was the fulfillment of a promise made by our class sponsor, Mr. Knight. He took us to a White Castle Restaurant, where the guys could eat as much as they wished. Our meals were paid for from class funds. I think I recall one of the fellows eating either 16 or 20 hamburgers.

There was still the matter of getting the individual money required for the three (3) Thornton siblings to buy a class ring. I remember cleaning classrooms as a means to that end. The twins worked as well, serving in the dining hall as a means of acquiring funds. In all good conscience we received our rings along with the rest of the class. It was not until some years later that I learned that Mr. Knight had “dipped” into some school funds to provide for part of the class trip as well as for some of our rings.
Chapter 10

Camp Tadmor

In the spring of 1949, a special opportunity came my way. The Red Cross offered swimming lessons in our area. What a treat! I had an opportunity to learn more about the skills and techniques of swimming – side stroke, breast stroke, crawl, diving. But an even greater thrill was mine (along with several of my siblings, my father, and Paul Mellow, who directed the Camp at which I worked during three summers) – Life Guard lessons. Above water approach, underwater approach, chest carry, hair carry (now, that was something, when my sister had to transport me through the water by a hair carry, and I had a crew cut), fireman’s carry, artificial respiration, etc. All these things were tremendously interesting to me.

I might add that I served as lifeguard at summer camps over the next 30 years, after that initial introduction to the craft.

My sister, Martha, age 14, also participated in the life guard training. She had a significant problem…how to deal with our father (her partner) who outweighed her by some 120 pounds. We all passed the test. Our father had done a good job of teaching us the rudiments of swimming, so this training was extra.

I served as lifeguard at Camp Tadmor for eight weeks each in the summers of 1949, 50 and 51. We had four two-week camps – a junior age girls, a junior-age boys, a teen-age mixed, and (to complete the summer) a camp for underprivileged boys from inner city St. Louis. This last camp was provided free of charge to the boys attending. (It might interest you to know that these boys frequently came to camp wearing free t-shirts from three or four other camps they had attended for free.)

The Director, Paul Mellow, was also one of the three male counselors. In addition to three lady counselors, the kitchen crew was composed of Paul’s wife, Bernadine, plus one or two helpers. My sisters, Elsie and Martha, served in that capacity. This was the staff required to handle sixty campers.
Perhaps the most memorable experience I had during those years was the following occasion: The “underprivileged” campers had arrived and were getting settled. I suddenly realized that several were absent. After a short search, I discovered them in the loft of the barn adjacent to the Big House. When I instructed them to leave the barn and get back to the rest of the Camp, the leader of the group, a fellow with one arm, proceeded to refuse. This promptly brought the rest of the campers, there present, around. When I repeated the directive, he proceeded to pull a knife and threaten me. (“Now, what do I do?” I thought, and concluded that it was better to act from a position of authority than from that of brute strength or ‘fighting ability.’) Only when I stood my ground and firmly restated my demand did he finally yield to my authority. (I think that he might well have inflicted damage on me had I endeavored to fight him.) Beside all that, I am satisfied that God took charge.

As an added item of interest, that same night (the first night of camp) the boys in the Green house refused to become quiet and go to sleep. Suddenly Paul showed up. Without preamble he commanded: “Everyone up, dressed, and ready for a hike in five minutes.”

“Wow! We get to go on a hike tonight!”

Paul led the hike. Across the road, through a fence (barbed wire), across the pasture and into the woods we went. The moon was shining…but in the woods there was a good deal of shadow. Occasionally a night bird would flit by, causing the hearts of these boys from the inner city to start. Suddenly they saw a man…leaning against a tree, a man with a patch over one eye…and a holstered pistol on his hip!

Paul said: “Wait here, while I go see if we can get by.” He went up to the man and quietly told him our situation. He promptly indicated that he would help. Then Paul returned to the boys and said: “We are to follow him without making a fuss…none at all.” So we did.

Our neighbor, for that is who he was, proceeded to lead the boys through some of the toughest brush and roughest terrain
around. After about an hour of following this shadowy figure, with an eye-patch and pistol, our rambunctious campers were very happy to quietly return to camp and a very quiet night’s sleep.

Those were some of the things that formed the background for God to work in the hearts and lives of campers. Future missionaries and pastors (including me) gained invaluable experience in ministry through their involvement in the counseling at Camp Tadmor.

One married couple, Norm and Ginny, were on staff one summer. When Ginny became ill, the rest of the staff serenaded her with the song:

“I dream of Ginny with the blue PJs,
Lying on the sack on the flat of her back.
We’re O, so sorry that she’s been there for days,
Lying on the sack on the flat of her back.
Many were the harsh notes
that from her mouth did pour.
Many were the headaches
and earaches so sore
“I dream of Ginny with the blue PJs,
Lying on the sack on the flat of her back.”
(Our apologies to the author of “I Dream of Jeannie…”)}
MILEPOST #4

Dayton, Tennessee
Chapter 11

College Days

In the fall of 1949, my grandparents drove me to Dayton, Tennessee so I could matriculate in William Jennings Bryan University (now known as Bryan College). I was driving as we entered Dayton. While stopped at an intersection that was marked by a traffic sign, I observed the oncoming driver making a right turn. Seeing no oncoming traffic, I made a left turn against the red light. Whereupon I quickly learned the difference between making a right or left turn on red. (Driving on gravel roads in Missouri had not prepared me for some nuances of driving in city traffic.)

The first official function of the school year was Freshman Reception. At this event, each freshman was guaranteed a date (assigned) – first freshman to freshman, then freshman to upper classman. My assigned date was June Zerung, a freshman girl from Indiana. June laughingly reminded some years later that I was so backward that I answered her questions (which, interpreted, means efforts to make conversation) with either single words or, at best, short sentences. Finally, in the comparative anonymity of a circle of eight students, I began to feel more comfortable. Especially when we began to discuss the merits of making men’s one piece dress suits for the purpose of ‘conserving material.’

At age sixteen, I was the youngest member of the freshman class. Although I did not find the scholastic aspect of college to be especially difficult, I did discover that I was not so well prepared for the social aspect of college life. I quickly learned that humor and laughter were great ways to conceal the lack of social ease I felt.

Working at the school was very rewarding, in that, while the starting pay of forty cents an hour now seems small, the lessons I learned by assuming these responsibilities has proven invaluable. Sweeping floors, carrying out trash cans, firing coal furnaces to heat the buildings, washing dishes, cooking for the
dining hall, and serving as busboy were different ways to acquire skills, demonstrate responsibility, and gain maturity.

In all this time, God was patiently leading me along and patiently waiting for me to grow in my spiritual life. Lewis Richards, a roommate in my junior year, was a special friend and encouraged me in my vision of following God. Lewis was two years old in Christ, but I discovered in him an insatiable hunger and thirst to know and follow God, which I had never personally felt. Our times of devotion together in the Word were especially helpful to me. Our friendship, which began in college, extended through Seminary as well.

There was a good bit of effort to get new students to join one of the campus organizations. Since I had no sense of “call” to either the Foreign Missions or the Pastors Fellowship, I entered the Lay Ambassadors Fellowship. And therein lies a tale:

Eventually I was made an officer. At one time my responsibility was to see that a song leader was provided for the meeting. Having had a desire to lead singing for some time, I delayed getting someone else to do this, so, I ended being the leader. “Not too smart, Chuck” (my endeavor was something less than a sterling performance)...but it was a beginning. Since that time I have had the privilege of serving as worship leader in several churches of which I was pastor.

I had a rather unusual experience on my way back to Bryan to begin my sophomore year. I rode a bus from Cuba to St. Louis, from where my grandparents would again drive me to Bryan. When I realized the St. Louis Bus Station was just 2 blocks from Hamilton Avenue, and I recalled that my grandparents lived just 2 blocks off the same Avenue, I says to myself: “Self, let’s just walk to Grandpa’s house.” Immediately I agreed with me, so we started out (I and Me, that is).

There was one hitch – my heavy duty leather expandable suitcase that had made several round trips to Japan, was exactly what I said – heavy. I had to switch sides about three times each block, in order to carry it well. Did I say: “Each block”? 
After 5 blocks of carrying (2 blocks over and 3 blocks up) I suddenly realized my mistake – I forgot to consider the fact that the bus station was on the 700 block, while Grandpa lived on the 5800 block. Now we math majors can do some adding, if it is made very clear to us. My equation went like this: 2 blocks + 2 blocks (to and from Hamilton Ave.) + (5800 – 700 [the block numbers of Grandpa and the bus station respectively]) = 4 + 51 = 55 blocks…to walk!

As I was traversing the fifth block, I met a man. Not just any man, but a man who was staggering from one saloon to another. He stopped me and we talked. When he learned that I was a college student, he told me that “he had gone to the school of hard knocks. He had ‘ridden a mule around the world.’” Furthermore, when he learned where I was bound (my grandfather’s), he took me in hand. Across the street stood a bar to which he directed our steps. (I wondered later if perhaps he was “an angel unawares,” although it is true that I did not “entertain” him.) When we got into the bar, he proceeded to phone a taxi, gave him the estimated fare, and sent me off to my grandparent’s house. I thanked (both) him and God.

But…the story is not yet finished. The cabbie and I were talking as he drove. When we were five or six blocks from our destination, the money (prepaid) ran out on the meter. The cabbie promptly turned off the meter and took me the rest of the way for free. Someone said something like this: “The Lord watches over college sophomores and other ignorant folk.” He does!

Bob Larson was a roommate during my sophomore year. He invited me to his home in Racine, Wisconsin for Christmas vacation. Bob’s father managed Rex Manufacturing, a company that provided needed items for larger companies. For a week I worked for him doing piece work. For eight hours a day I sat with the following assignment: “Into one small cloth sack (the size of Bull Durham tobacco sack) put 6 bolts, 7 nuts, 8 washers, then fold directions sheet, stuff it in, tie and throw into a bin.” I am satisfied that I would have soon starved if that were to be my means of livelihood.
I was able to buy a guitar for $20.00 (marked down from $40.00). I think the owner of the music store had put a tiny scratch on it at the request of my roommate’s father. This was my first guitar. I had wanted one ever since Mary Jane Collier taught me four basic guitar chords – C, D7, F and G. I could play simple songs in two keys with those chords. Boy! Was I ever happy!

Bob’s church youth group went to Milwaukee for a tobogganing outing. I was invited along. Audrey Mayer, a schoolmate from Bryan whose home was in Milwaukee, was also invited to join us. In addition to tobogganing, the group wanted to go ice skating. So-o-o, having secured some skates, I began walking toward the outdoor ice rink. Upon seeing little children whizzing around, while others were practicing their “figure eights” and “I don’t know what elses,” I decided to sit and watch.

Meanwhile, back at the ran (oops!) school, I met Bob Lehnhart. Bob was a student from Mansfield, Ohio. We met because our scheduled use of the laundry room coincided. In conversation with him, he informed me that his cousin (who, incidentally, was a pianist) would be coming to Bryan the next year. I should meet her. Perhaps this would be different from the Freshman Reception, in that I already had sort of a “pre-introduction” to her though Bob. Maybe meeting Janice would not be such a social fiasco as meeting June had been.

The fall of ’51 arrived right on schedule. Janice and I met – right on schedule. On our first date I did what I believed was appropriate, I prayed with Janice that God be pleased with our time together. Little did I realize that she was looking for someone who put God and His will as a priority, and this served as an indicator, to her, that I fit that part of her list.

We can not recall just what our first date entailed. I once asked her to attend a Harlem Globetrotters’ basketball game in Chattanooga. On another occasion, we rode together to a Bible Conference at Taccoa Falls, Georgia. (We sat on the flat floor behind the second seat of a station wagon).

The most humorous situation for us (also embarrassment for Janice) was the time Harriette and Lewis, and Janice and I
double dated to church. At Bryan, chaperones were required whenever couples traveled by car, so we asked Mrs. Williamson (the pastor’s wife) to be ours. All went well until we left the church. I drove the car to the front of the church and opened the front door for Janice and Mrs. Williamson. Without thinking, Mrs. W. got in first. I was too shy to say anything, so Janice ended up seated on the right side of the car. I closed the door and proceeded around the car to the driver’s side. Watching friends began to laugh. As we made a “U” turn to start back to Bryan, Mrs. W. realized what she had done. She gasped, reached over to her right, literally picked Janice up, and moved over, while lifting Janice to the middle of the seat. Of course Janice was embarrassed. So was I.

I recall that my most ardent display of affection for her was to hold her hand (in my coat pocket) as we walked back to campus from an interclass basketball game. (The weather was cold, and I was concerned over her well-being. Oh, Yeah!)

In my senior year (1952-53), Martha and Elsie came to Bryan also. It was great to have two sisters along. After Christmas break, Elsie remained at home to assist Mom. I’ll let Martha speak to that time: “I do remember how lonely I felt, returning to Bryan that second quarter without Elsie. She stayed at home to help Mama, since our littlest sister Susan was underway. I had to go through our wardrobe and send half of it home to Elsie. That cut us both pretty short. But then Grandma T tells of having only two dresses in college...one for classes, one for church. So, I guess we had it pretty good. I continued to do your laundry those last two quarters before you graduated. That sure caused a stir in the minds of the Dean of Women and other leaders. We had had to convince them that it was a natural thing for women to do laundry for the men folk. But then all the single girls would see men's underwear hanging on the lines. What sort of problems could that evoke?”
Chapter 12

Christian Service

“Welcome to College.”
“Welcome to a Christian College (Bryan, no less).”
“Welcome to the world of Christian Service while in college.”

Do you mean to say that I must be engaged in some form of Christian service on a regular basis? I tried to witness once (remember the skating rink episode?), and I quickly learned that verbal communication is not my “thing.”

Whew! It’s great to know that singing in a church choir qualifies. So for the first two years I sang in the Sale Creek Presbyterian Church choir. (I was half of the bass section while one or two other students made up the tenor section.)

By the way, just how does someone without a car attend a church eleven miles from school? Ian and June Hay were seniors during my freshman year. They graciously provided my transportation. Then the Hoyts let me ride with them through my sophomore year. Each year some car owner had room for me.

In my junior year I was able to become part of the “Street Meeting Quartet” which sang for various ministries, such as: Street Gospel Meetings, jail services and even some church services. I felt unable to do something “on my own,” but as one of a group it seemed that I could serve God. This ministry lasted through both my Junior and Senior years at Bryan.

As a P.S. to that involvement, it proved to be a great delight to be able to sing with two other men from that Quartet in yet another quartet during all three years of Seminary.

Also, during College days, the subject of Spiritual Gifts arose. After hearing some messages on the subject and seeking to do some (pretty elementary) personal study also, I concluded that of all the gifts, there was only one which I might conceivably have - Helps. Now, how should I seek to exercise it? After some deliberation, I felt I could use such a gift by seeking to assist a fellow student in his endeavors to learn German. “Buddy” Fritz
was struggling so he accepted my offer to help him learn. (Perhaps we laughed more than we learned, but I did indeed look upon that experience as my first endeavor to serve God with a spiritual gift.)

Just as arithmetic precedes geometry, there is often a deepening or broadening growth in ministry.

In the summer of 1952, I had the privilege of traveling for eight weeks as a member of the Foreign Missions Fellowship (FMF) Quartet. Four singers and a piano player (coming from three different schools) met for a week near Asheville, NC for the purpose of practice and orientation. We then devoted eight weeks to traveling some 8,000 miles in the interest of the Gospel and Foreign Missions.

During the summer, we learned something about trusting God for daily provision in a quite literal way. We sang in churches, Sunday Schools, camps, Youth for Christ rallies, Gospel Missions, etc. There was no promise of support. We were given free-will offerings at the various churches in which we ministered. (In fact, we slept two nights on the beach at Daytona, Florida because we had insufficient funds for a motel.) After paying our own way from home to Asheville and putting $5.00 each into the “kitty” for expenses, we had sufficient money to get bus fare back home at the end of the summer.

For one week we served as counselors at Camp Beckwith, a Youth for Christ camp in West Virginia. Charles Martin, who later was a seminary classmate of mine, was the director. At the evening campfire service, one night, the message was from Isaiah 28:28 - “Bread Corn is Bruised.” I have never forgotten the truth of the message. If I wished to be used greatly by God, I must be willing to “go through the grinder,” to be tested and proved as part of my preparation to be effectively used in the service of God.

At the conclusion of the summer’s travels, I had sufficient funds to take a bus to Mansfield, Ohio to visit Janice. I was invited to share Sunday dinner with her family. When the time came, I was seated next to her brother-in-law Evan Adams. When
I passed the chicken to him, I knocked over a glass of water...right into his lap. Just about then I wished I could crawl into a hole, and pull it in after me. But...I passed the test, and four years later became Janice’s husband and Mrs. Baer became a dearly loved mother-in-law.

Then back to the senior year at Bryan...without any summer savings for school. But “my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches.” What a glorious promise! In fact, I was able to graduate with no financial obligations.

Janice visited my family at Christmas vacation that year. I remember how happy I was that my family could meet her.

In the spring of 1953, Bryan had its usual interclass competition involving track and field events. I recall having been down sick with the flu for several days before the meet. That day I endeavored to do the high jump...and succeeded in tying the school record, which had been set by Joel Kettenring, a former student and friend of mine. (Is it possible that I wanted to impress Janice? No one will ever really know.)

I had been elected president of the choir that year (52-53). It was also the first year the college choir planned to make a ministry trip. Wouldn’t you know – I came down with the mumps, just in time for two things to happen: 1) I missed the choir tour, and 2) I had to take mid-quarter exams in bed.

You can imagine my surprise when, after completing a five-page printed test, Ralph Maynard (who brought the test to me) began shaking each page of the test separately. When I asked him what he was doing, he replied: “Miss Rader told me to be certain to shake all the germs off the test papers before I returned them to her.” We shared a good laugh. Despite some idiosyncrasies, Miss Rader was a very special lady. She loved God intensely. She was my first Bible teacher (Old Testament and New Testament). She also was the Dean of Women for Bryan.
MILEPOST #4

El Paso, Texas
Chapter 13

A Brief Delay

I was scheduled to be drafted into military service in March of my senior year in college. That induction into the army was delayed twice. First, the draft board allowed me to complete my senior year of college, and rescheduled my reporting until July. So, I graduated, went home, and went to work with Dad, who was doing some plumbing work in Cuba, Missouri. The day before I was to report for induction, as I recall, we were digging a ditch from the house to the street to hook up to the city water supply. It was a very hot day. I began to feel quite “poorly,” as folks around there were prone to say. In fact, I began to have a fever. That afternoon I went to see our doctor. After some tests, he pronounced his diagnosis: “Yellow Jaundice” (probably better known as infectious hepatitis).

On my way home I delivered the doctor’s letter to the draft board. The message ran: “Dear Uncle Sam, Please excuse Charlie from your war. He’s sick. Signed, Dr (I forget)” – well, at least something like that.. I was sent home “straight way” for complete bed rest. After two weeks of that, I felt good enough to travel by bus to Greenfield, Illinois. There I visited my grandparents, while staying in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Burroughs, their friends from the church. I later discovered that I may have still been contagious during the early stages of this trip, but “ignorance is bliss.”

Because of that illness, my induction was postponed again, for nine months. The initial time was spent in further recuperation. Then, late in August, I had the unique experience of helping Ruth and Paul Caldwell (my sister and her husband) move to New York City. There he entered a Bible School. Ruth, being “great with child,” flew to New York from St. Louis, while Paul and I drove their car. To conserve expenses, we slept alongside the highway the first night. You can imagine my chagrin when, early in the morning, very early, I was rudely awakened by the pressure of concrete on my back. You see, the
Air mattress had sprung a leak during the night and let me down slowly, but oh, so surely to the harsh reality of “no mattress.” The second night we slept in a bed at my Uncle Paul and Aunt Helen Eckel’s home in Bethesda, Maryland.

After Paul arrived at the school in New York, I was able to go to Hoboken, New Jersey, to see Bill and Mary Widbin ship out on their first term of missionary service. After seeing the ship pull out of the harbor, I drove their 1940 Chevrolet car and trailer (with which they hauled their entire luggage to be shipped) back to St. Louis.

Well…not straight back. You see, I had discovered that Dayton, Tennessee was only a “little” bit off the closest way from Hoboken to St. Louis. So I drove back to Bethesda, Maryland to spend another night with the Eckels. The next day I drove to Dayton, Tennessee and Bryan College. Having arrived after lights out, I found a straw pile in the pasture. There I slept. (Now that I live in Alaska, I am happy the weather was Tennessee weather rather than Alaskan.) The next day I saw Janice…and the next. Then I returned the car to St. Louis, and then home again.

During the final six months of delay, I moved to St. Louis, Missouri to work. My first job was for The Chamberlain Company, insulating houses, churches and other buildings. This was interesting work, although it was very dirty. Many of the buildings we insulated were old. For well over a century many of the buildings in St. Louis had been heated with coal. Coal dust had infiltrated attics, walls and ceilings. Since most of our work was above the ceilings of the edifice which we were insulating, we were often covered with coal dust at the end of the day.

One especially interesting job was insulating a downtown Catholic Church. We began by climbing a twenty foot extension, that was extended to its limits (36 feet). First we had to take up enough slate shingles to get a four inch hose through the roof into the space above the nave. I well remember how much ‘spring’ the ladder had as I stood at its midpoint, pulling the hose up so we could feed it through the roof into the building. One of us would then feed insulation into the blower in the truck, while the other
would direct the spraying insulation around to adequately and evenly cover the ceiling. On one day there was a wedding in the church. We found it necessary to stop work during that time. Immediately above (high above – at least 25 feet) the place where the priest stood was a 2-foot square sheet of metal…with a 4 inch hole in its middle. During our enforced idleness, Boots and I took turns looking down at the wedding taking place below.

I wonder, sometimes, what God thinks as He looks down on our busy lives here below.

After about a month of that work, I was hired by MacDonnell Aircraft Corporation to work as a Weights Analyst. My work station was a desk in a room (a single room) that contained 5,000 desks. My job was to compute from aircraft plans how much individual parts weighed, plus ascertaining what effect that weight (moment) would have on the plane’s balance, both front to rear as well as side to side. But wait, there is more. I then walked down to the shop, located that specific part, and then literally weighed it. This was to confirm the accuracy of the engineers who designed the plane and its parts.

Why go to all that work? The balance of an airplane was critical to its safety when it was flying into battle, and MacDonnell Aircraft was building fighter planes for the Air Force. I was one cog in the gears that produced materiel and machines designed to help protect the security of the USA. About six months later, I was drafted into the army. At that time I was assured of having a job at MacDonnell Aircraft when I returned to civilian life, if I so wished.

Shortly after I moved to St. Louis, a friend of mine contacted me. Tobey was the pianist for the St. Louis Gospelaires (a gospel quartet similar to the famed Blackwood Brothers). When their bass singer dropped out, Toby suggested that I be given an opportunity to sing. When I met with the other members for a tryout, they were amazed at how well I read their music. What they did not know was that for the previous four years, at Bryan College, I had listened to gospel quartet music. Most of the songs this group sang were ones I had sung along with in the
Octagon Dormitory. I was accepted! I had yet another means of serving God!

For about eight months, I was able to sing the gospel. This was another way in which I was allowed to seek to honor God in my life by means of some ability He had given me.

Finally the day came! On March 24, 1954 I was to report for induction into Uncle Sam’s Army. I packed my bag, said my “Goodbyes,” and went to the Induction Center in downtown St. Louis. There I took “two steps forward and raised my right hand.” Then I gave my oath of allegiance to my country as a member of the U.S. Army.

The next step was to travel to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, for basic training. While we waited for the bus, some representatives of the Gideons came to present us with New Testaments. Among them I recognized a man who attended my grandfather’s church. This was yet another way in which I was reminded that God has many and varied ways for His people to serve Him.

Finally we were underway. After roughly five hours of travel, we arrived at Camp Chaffee. There we were greeted, shorn (I learned that the proverbial “60 second haircut” was actually 60 seconds – from the time you sat down until the time the next fellow sat down), issued clothing and a gun, and hustled off to our barracks. I was now a member of “Dog 10” – D Company of the 10th Medium Tank Battalion of the 5th Armored Division. For the next eight weeks I was expected to be hounded, harassed and hammered into something resembling a soldier.

The next chapter will relate the story of my first night in the army.

Meanwhile I was learning something about army discipline. Waking up at 5:30 am was not difficult for me. I had risen early for years to do chores when I was living at home. Obeying orders was no strain, either, for Dad was a stickler for prompt obedience.
I am, by nature, somewhat ‘laid back’ in my approach to life. This tendency was the cause for a memorable experience during my first week in the service. I was told to report to the First Sergeant. As I presented myself at his desk, I failed to report in proper military fashion. He immediately called me to task for this egregious error of military discipline. As punishment I was ‘sentenced’ to fifteen minutes of “reporting to, while properly saluting, the electric light pole just outside the Company office. Oh, yes…make certain you are speaking loudly enough for the First Sergeant to hear you.” I assure you that I learned my lesson.
Chapter 14

“Crunch time in the Rose Bowl”

There I was… in the middle of the field, on the fifty yard line, at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. One hundred six thousand people were watching in the stands, thirty-nine million others were glued to their TV sets. “It’s crunch time, old Buddy.” And there I was…all alone. What should I do? What could I do? What would I do?

March 24, 1954 is a watershed day in my life. On that day (actually night) I made the most important decision of my life, second only to that of becoming a Christian in the summer of 1945. It was the day I was inducted into the U.S. Army at St. Louis, Missouri and sent to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas for Basic Training.

But wait…let me back up a minute in order to explain my purpose in writing this story about myself. It’s all about “honor thy father and thy mother…” (Exodus 20:12), and, as a Christian, I want to honor God in every way possible, including this directive.

This profoundly significant command from the Old Testament has not been abrogated in the New. There has been no lessening of its importance for those who rejoice in the truth of living “not under law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14).

“Oh-h-h! I can’t do that” or “I must do this,” are issues every serious believer wrestles with during his or her lifetime. This obligation must be applied during two phases of life; first, while a son or daughter is living under the “chain of command,” or second, after moving to the “chain of counsel” of his or her parents.

The first of these is considerably easier to both understand and apply. This is operative during infancy and childhood, as well as those years when the individual is “under the roof” (so to speak) of the parents. Submission to parental authority and conduct guidelines carries with it an element of safety under the umbrella of the father’s headship. The major issue, the struggle to
acquiesce to the will of the parents, is especially apparent during the adolescent and young adult years. These are the years during which a young person is seeking to develop his individuality as well as assume the control of his own affairs.

The second involves the time after a young person leaves home (for either marriage or independent living) or remains at home, but becomes “adult” in that he or she now assumes personal responsibility for plans, conduct, and lifestyle.

It is at this stage of life that many young people get “lost” in the process of becoming responsible adults. They somehow find it difficult, or impossible, to shift from a “secondary” obedience to God (through their parents) to a conscious commitment to maintain a direct accountability to God. I believe that my personal commitment to please Christ in every aspect of my life is the greatest way in which I may continue to “honor my parents.”

Now let me get back to my story:

That first night in camp, I was suddenly impressed with the thought that, for the first in my life, I was totally free to make personal choices. Prior to this time I had had family, church, school (Bryan College), or Christian friends who were aware of my speech and conduct. Now there was no one to see or hear (much less care) how I acted or what I said. I could choose to live either for Christ or the devil. There was no one to pressure me to conform to any standard of life.

What would my Dad, or Grandpa Thornton, or Dean Ryther (from Bryan), or some of my Christian friends want me to do?

But they were not there to see, or care, or share their opinion.

I was on my own. I knew no one. I had no direct contact with anyone who was even a Christian (so far as I knew).

Should I bow my head to pray before eating in the mess hall? Should I kneel at my bunk to pray before going to bed? What difference does posture make in prayer, anyway? The comfort of being with others who openly loved and honored God
was no longer a support to me. “The fear of man bringeth a snare” is no empty platitude.

Or, maybe, should I just forget about living as a believer. Since no one with whom I was acquainted was around to see or know, why not just “go with the flow,” relax, and not try to maintain a “Christian” image. It might be lot easier that way.

“Well, Charlie (Chuck to ‘later’ comers into my life), the choice is up to you. You are free to make your own decision…and you will also bear any repercussions for such choices.”

What will it be? “Tonight’s the first night of the rest of your life, Big Gash” (I could hear my friend, Bob Lehnhart, say). It’s crunch time.

How I praise God for enabling me, at that time, to choose to be open about my faith. I knelt at my bunk that night, wondering if someone would snicker at me, or throw boots at me, or…whatever. Two days later, as I was leaving the Mess hall, a fellow asked me if I was a Christian. He had seen me bow my head in prayer at the table before I ate. I now had met my first Christian acquaintance in the army…and all because I bowed my head to pray before eating!

Most significantly, I have observed that many professing Christians lack a sense of response (and accountability) to God in their lives. Instead they constantly measure their lives against the standards of their father, family, church, pastor, or some such. This often results in an emaciated faith; a faith that can excuse violation of high standards because the “standard setter” is not God.

This sense of personal commitment and, therefore, accountability to God Himself has proven to be the fundamental basis for the various Biblical, doctrinal, vocational and other decisions I have needed to make through the subsequent years.

It really wasn’t the Rose Bowl. (I think you realize that.) But I have it on good authority that angels and demons…and Jesus…and God Himself were watching (Hebrews 12:1). And…I think my Dad and others were pleased that I was set on following
God in the light of His Word, though my path may not be precisely theirs.

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**Snippets**

I think the words of my Grandfather, J.B. Thornton, describing his own personal “turning point,” also express well this my personal “Bar Mitzvah,” upon entering the army: “My explanation for this conviction (is) the fact that all that preceded that experience now seems to have been leading to that great hour, as all that followed it flowed from it.”

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11
Chapter 15

The Army

(A Post Graduate Course in the Human Heart)

After “graduating” from basic training, we were given a two-week leave. Then it was back to the old grind – more training. This time we were trained in the art of shooting 105 or 155 mm howitzers. We traded our M-1 rifles for carbines. We also traded our boots for trucks – well, actually we learned that the saying that artillerymen ‘rode everywhere’ just is not true. We still walked.

Meanwhile, Arkansas, in June, could be a pretty hot and humid place. It was not unusual to have one or more soldiers faint from the heat on the parade ground. But we were training, and learning, and expecting to be sent to Korea when we completed our second eight weeks of training.

One evening, after the duties of the day were done, I was walking near the PX. Imagine my surprise when I heard music. Upon getting closer, I saw three fellows singing hymns to the accompaniment of a guitar. And…I knew the songs (well, at least some of them). The singers were happy to have me join them, so I had the joy of singing some of the songs I had learned in the Ozarks – songs that were part of the worship in many country churches. This became a frequent occurrence (two to three times each week) during the time I was at the Camp.

God oversees the path of His own. During the second ‘eight weeks training’ period, after which I was to go to Korea with my outfit, I suddenly received orders to report to Fort Bliss, Texas. I was one of eighteen soldiers reassigned from our training battalion, eleven of whom were sent to Fort Bliss, Texas for guided missile work. My assumption is that I was chosen for this duty because I had a degree with a major in Mathematics, since mathematics plays such a significant role in the computer technology required for guided missiles.

This was, for me, clear evidence that “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it
wherever He wishes” (Pro. 21:1). That verse was one I placed as a beacon whenever I considered whether I should enter military service. The thought of possibly ‘taking the life of another human being’ as a soldier was something I did not relish. However, I felt confident that, if God so directed that I be placed where such was demanded of me, I would “do with (my) might what (my) hands find to do.” That seemed to be a good balance between the biblical directive to “obey those in authority” and “do good to all.”

During the twenty-one months I was stationed at Ft. Bliss, Texas, I was assigned to the 495th AAA Missile Battalion. The first three weeks on the base were quite interesting – five other fellows and I were assigned to ‘police the area’ around our barracks. Why? In order to work in guided missiles, we were required to have a governmentally rated Secret Clearance. I, having been born in Japan, found that there was some question about my allegiance to our country, and a fellow named Ulner, who had spent six weeks visiting an uncle in Germany, was also checked out carefully. The same was true of the other four – some possible deterrent had to be sorted out. Finally we were cleared, and could begin doing what we had been selected to do.

The first nine months I worked at either our Ft. Bliss installation, training officers for Nike units around the U.S., or at the Red Canyon Range Camp, where Nike units came from across the country to do actual missile firings. Our responsibility was to keep the Nike equipment maintained and ready for those units to use so they would be combat ready in the event of need.

The final twelve months of my duty were spent on detached duty with Board Four (a Nike installation emplaced at White Sands Proving Grounds, in New Mexico). Our responsibility was to test all new Nike missile improvements. Just about every two weeks we conducted live firing of missiles at remote-controlled drones. Six of us from the 495th actually lived in our own barracks and drove to White Sands each day to do our work. I was assigned to be a missile control computer operator.
Snippets

Once, while driving a military Jeep to the Red Canyon Range Camp, I stopped to look closely at an old lava flow across which the highway ran. I was delighted to observe, within 200 yards of the road, the various steps of ‘nature’s recovery’ from the devastating effects of molten lava flow. In Botany class, at Bryan, I had learned about this. But I was impressed at how God almost understates the case when David reminds us that He “maketh grass to grow upon the mountains” (Ps 147:8).

I attended the Bible Presbyterian Church in El Paso. Another of the steps in service was taken in that fellowship.

In the church, they had a Jet Cadet program for the junior age children. I was given an opportunity to become one of the leaders. One situation especially comes to mind:

An Air Force Lieutenant named Bob began to desire to serve God, so I asked him to assume responsibility for teaching the books of the Bible to the children.

“But I don’t know them myself, so how could I teach the children?”

“You need only know the next section by the beginning of the hour.”

So…Bob taught the children the books of the Bible (they loved it) and they never realized that their teacher was learning along with them! Here is an exciting ‘postscript’ – Bob went from the Air Force to Moody Bible Institute to train for the Lord’s service.

What a valuable lesson! Ever since then, I have had the joy of learning as I seek to teach people God’s wonderful truth. Indeed, I have frequently learned something through some searching question or insight of one of my people.

Another, very special, opportunity came about in the following manner. The Hans Kunert family, only recently immigrated from Germany, began attending Hillside Church. When I learned that they spoke German, I endeavored to practice my limited knowledge when speaking with them. They seemed to
appreciate the fact that someone would speak their mother tongue with them.

Then, sorrow filled their hearts, because their 12 year old daughter died. As they made plans for the funeral, they asked me to sing a song in German. When I agreed to do so, they provided me with a German Hymnal. I began practicing the song. Then I remembered that God’s Word states: “So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air…Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me…Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.” In light of that instruction, I procured a German/English Dictionary, with which I laboriously translated the words of “So Nimmt den Meine Hande, und Fuhre Mich” into English. At the service, just before I sang, I read the English translation, for the benefit of the English-speaking people present (most of those present were). The Kunerts were so appreciative, they sent to Germany for another German Hymnal, which I prize to this day. On the first page is inscribed (in German): “From your German friends, with much love, many thanks, The Hans Kunert Family.”

A rather humorous side note to the previous paragraph is that about two weeks after the funeral, as I was cleaning out my locker, I came across the InterVarsity Hymn book. Imagine my surprise to find the hymn: “Take Thou My Hand and Lead Me” inside. As I checked it out, it was the very song I had labored so hard to translate. (P.S. – I didn’t do such a bad job of translation.)

For a number of years after leaving military service, I had recurring memories of the foul speech of many of my fellow soldiers. Whether by taking God’s name in vain, or speaking of thoughts or acts of immorality, I seemed to be inundated with ungodly thinking. I asked God to “guard (my) …mind” (Phil.4:7). The Noble Taylor family and the Bible Presbyterian Church were like a city of refuge and fellowship for me in those days.
Chapter 16

It Is not Good to Be Alone

I was able to get some time off, so I went to Mansfield, Ohio to visit Janice during her Christmas vacation in 1954. (I had received assurance from God that she was His choice to be my wife and life mate.) During that visit, I asked her to marry me. You may imagine my surprise when she responded with a “No.”

I asked: “Why?” You see, I had discussed this matter with God to some extent, and He and I were in agreement. In fact, I believed (and still do) that He enabled me to get the leave time so I could ask Janice that all-important question.

Janice’s answer caused me to realize something about our relationship. I had determined, even before starting to date her, how I would treat any woman. I would so conduct myself that if, at any time before marriage, I should die, she would be able to go into marriage with someone else in absolute purity. As a result, other than holding her hand on a (very) few occasions, I had never shown her any expressions of affection.

She expressed to me her questioning of my love for her because I had never expressed my affection. Well…I promptly began making some changes in that aspect of our relationship. I then returned to Texas without a positive answer from her. But I had hope. This was a bit unusual, in that I was in the habit of assuming that other people took James’ words to heart: “…let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay…” Under normal conditions I would have said goodbye, gone my way and ‘moved on.’ But…I believed this marriage was part of God’s plan for our lives, so I couldn’t just ignore the matter.

In the spring of 1955, I was able to take some leave time in order to attend Janice’s graduation from Bryan. I did three things in preparation for that time.

First, I wrote my friend, and former roommate, Jim Reese to ask him to purchase a corsage for Janice (from me, of course) for the Senior Banquet. This he did. (I learned later that he was
preparing to ask Janice to be his date to that same banquet, but my request ‘cut him off at the pass.’"

Second, I wrote Ralph Maynard, another friend, asking him to learn what size ring Janice wore. He had been recently engaged, so he got his fiancée, Melba, to work that part out. I received a card from him with the following message: “Ring size: 6 ½. BOING! Ralph.” I proceeded to purchase a ring, without yet having her answer to my matrimonial question.

Third, I was determined to ask Janice’s mother for her permission to marry Janice. Wouldn’t you know, there never seemed to be a good time. I took Janice for a nice quiet drive the night before graduation – a perfect time to ask her again – but I hadn’t yet talked with Mrs. Baer. It wasn’t until after the graduation service (Janice had gone to the dormitory to change out of her robe) that I could get her mother alone. When I asked her, she seemed to be happy to say, “Yes.”

Excusing myself, I went to the entrance to the girls’ dorm, and sent someone up to ask Janice to meet me on the stair landing. When she came, I simply gave her the ring. (I must have thought that if I asked no questions, she wouldn’t be able to say; “No.”) She kept it! Then she returned upstairs. Within about, say, fifteen seconds of arriving at the top of the stairs, screams began emanating from the upper floor – the usual sign of excitement over someone getting engaged.

I, simply put, wasn’t ready to become married until some time after I was graduated from Bryan. In fact, it was four years after we first met (1951) that we became engaged (1955). Then another 15 months later that we became husband and wife.

In September of 1955, I had the privilege of attending a men’s retreat at Ruidoso, New Mexico. The Hillside Bible Presbyterian Church sponsored it. Martin Massenger, president of Dallas Bible Institute in Dallas, Texas was the speaker. His series of messages was taken from 2 Timothy. One in particular, on 2 Timothy 2:15 (“Study to show thyself approved unto God…”) was used by the Holy spirit to reveal to me that God desired that I get further training in the Word of God.
Where should I go? How was I to know? I had at that time been engaged to be married to Janice for about four months. How would this affect these plans?

I contacted the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois, as well as Midwest Bible Institute in St. Louis, Missouri. Both schools had a standing rule that prohibited newly married couples from attending within 12 months of their wedding date. So now, what was I to do? I had never given much thought to the difference between a Bible Institute (designed with high school graduates in mind) and a Seminary that looked to college graduates as its primary source of students.

In God’s providence, I visited Janice at the Brethren Navajo Mission in New Mexico, at Thanksgiving time, as I recall. She was teaching there during the interim between graduating from college and our wedding. Who should be there but the Vice President and the Dean of Grace Theological Seminary, Drs. Paul R. Bauman and Herman A. Hoyt, respectively? As I talked with them about my desire for Bible training, they informed me about Grace. Among other matters, I learned that recent marriage by students was no hindrance to attending. One of them smilingly told me that Grace was “like a shoe factory – putting two souls together and sending them out in pairs.” Therefore, I requested a catalogue, with the result that I applied and was accepted as a student at Grace Seminary.

Just before Christmas of 1955, Janice came to El Paso to visit me. She stayed in the Noble Taylor home during her stay. (One reason for her coming, she later confessed, was to make certain that Mrs. Taylor’s sister, Mona Brown, was not ‘distracting’ me. No danger!)

The people of the church had planned to go Christmas caroling, so Janice and I went. Actually I had been asked to lead one of the two caroling groups. As it so happened, I had contracted a sore throat so I needed to see the Doctor for some medication. As we sat in the waiting room, we smiled to see a young boy walk out of the examining room rubbing his hip, where he had just received a shot.
The Doctor prescribed a similar injection for me also. As a result, when I walked out into the waiting room I couldn’t resist reaching down and ‘tenderly’ rubbing my hip as well. Janice laughed. Then we went caroling. Immediately afterward, we were taken to the bus station to catch an all-night ride north to the Brethren Navajo Mission. There I spent Christmas vacation with Janice, her mother, and the Adams family (not the one of TV fame, but her sister’s family).

One special memory of that trip was going caroling to Cuba, New Mexico, with staff members of the Mission. We sang carols in four languages: English, Navajo, Spanish and German. We also traveled to some Navajo hogans to carol.

Snippets
One special recollection of army days was having the privilege of seeing another soldier become a believer. (He’s the one who said to me, “Now this is nothing personal, but I hate you because you’re a Christian.”) Three of us believers committed ourselves to both befriend him and pray for him. About eighteen months later, he became a believer.

I spent the remainder of my active service time back at Ft. Bliss. On March 23, 1956 I was mustered out of active service. I rode a bus to California to visit my cousin, Ralph Page Klages, who managed a greenhouse there. By that means he kept his ‘fingers in the soil,’ while enjoying the conveniences of city living. (When we lived in Missouri, Cousin Ralph used to come to Tadmor each year immediately after school was out in the spring…and returned home just in time for Aunt Alice to buy his school clothes in the fall.)

From California I returned home by way of the Navajo Mission. There I installed floor tile for Angie Garber, who devoted some forty years to ministry among the Navajos.

Then, back to civilian life.
MILEPOST #6

Winona Lake, Indiana
Chapter 17

Interlude

Someone has said that the life of a fireman is composed of “hours of absolute boredom interspersed with short periods of intense panic.” Much of life appears to be like that as well. There are often extended periods of monotonous sameness, with short periods of (seemingly) rapid change.

The shift from military service to seminary was one of those change times.

The first two weeks after discharge I have already related. When I arrived at St. Louis, I stopped at the home of a dear friend of my mother, whose husband had procured a car for me. I paid him $395.00 for a 1951 black Plymouth 4-door sedan. I then drove to Greenfield to my parents’ home, for a few days.

From there I proceeded to Mansfield, Ohio, where I had a job and a girl waiting (though not in that order of importance). You have already met the girl, who has been my companion through the rest of the time covered by this book. I was hired to work at the Therm-O-Disc plant as part of the summer crew. Harold Bolesky (“Hod”) was one of three brothers who owned the plant. Hod served as VP of Personnel. He had a great spot in his heart for college students, and looked to provide summer employment for them. He was also a member of the Grace Brethren Church of Mansfield, where Janice was a member. His significance in my life will be further revealed as we go along.

I roomed with a lady who lived next door to our church. I had kitchen privileges, but did very poorly at making use of them. My usual breakfast was at a Café in downtown Mansfield. There I would commonly order bacon and eggs, hot cakes or biscuits and gravy, and (if I were particularly hungry) something more. Lunch was usually sandwiches, made by a certain young lady whose home I passed on the way to work. The supper (dinner for people who are accustomed to “dine” at night) was frequently at 43 West Cook Road where Janice’s mother made certain I had plenty to eat. Mom Baer continued that practice.
until she was no longer able to cook. She ‘forced’ me to take seconds (not a difficult task, since I have kept my ‘farmer’s appetite’ even though I have led a more sedentary lifestyle).

The work at Therm-O-Disc was varied. There was regular summer work; painting and helping with maintenance. There was also work involved with the construction of expansion space. Our department was responsible for installing the electrical system, plus hooking up the various shop machines.

One day we asked time off (Janice was working there also) and drove to Winona Lake, Indiana, to see if she could get work as a school teacher. After all, she had taught Navajos for a year. (For lunch we enjoyed her picnic specialty – tuna salad sandwiches and carrot sticks.) You can imagine our disappointment when we learned that Indiana had very strict teacher standards, and there was a ‘super-abundance’ of teacher applicants. Of those, a number already possessed teaching credentials, while Janice had ‘only’ experience.

Her disappointment was so great that, despite her resolution to “keep a stiff upper lip,” she began to cry. I knew she had been looking forward to helping meet the financial needs of Seminary. We hadn’t yet left the parking lot of the School Administration office, so I drove a couple blocks to a quiet spot. There we stopped, and prayed. The Scripture: “But my God shall supply all your need…” came to mind. So we just claimed it as God’s promise to us. Now, don’t the words “just claimed” sound simple and sufficient…and ‘spiritual?’ Well they are simple words, all right. Sometimes, however, there is a bit of a stretch to bridge the gap between saying the words and acting on them.

Then came (Tah Dah!) the Wedding! August the 10th has been a noteworthy date ever since 1956. Janice and I were married on that day, in the Grace Brethren Church of Mansfield, Ohio. Our pastor, Bernard (Bernie) Schneider, walked Janice down the aisle and gave her away for Mrs. Baer. This was fitting for two reasons: first, Janice’s father died of pneumonia complications when she was only five, and second, Bernie had impacted both Janice and me in a great way.
My parents came from Illinois to share in the happy occasion. My brother Sam was a groomsman. Bob Lehnhart, Janice’s cousin, who had introduced us at Bryan, served as Best Man. Joan, Janice’s sister, was Matron of Honor. Her brother Carl played violin solo, while his wife Carolee was one of her attendants. Joan’s husband, Evan Adams, performed the ceremony, while my father gave us a biblical challenge regarding our marriage relationship.

Snippets
My landlady, Ruth Drake, attended the wedding. She was a divorced woman. After she heard my father’s charge to Janice and me, she told me she wished she had heard those things before she had married. If so, she might well still be married.

As a practical joke, Jim, one of my groomsmen, poured a half can of valve cleaner into my car’s carburetor, plus another two and a half cans into the gas tank. After finally getting the car started, we had smoke pouring out of the tail pipe. When we left the church, I could only think of a destroyer laying down a smoke screen during WWII. For the next year, I added 2 quarts of oil at every gasoline fill up.

The Boleskies had given us the use of their cabin up at Lake Erie for the weekend. What a special treat for a limited finances honeymoon! Then, back to 43 West Cook Road for the time remaining before moving to Winona Lake for Seminary.

Do you recall that we claimed Philippians 4:19 about our financial needs? Well…God did just what He had promised. I found work at Gatke’s Foundry (twenty-five hours per week), and Janice worked during the fall of 1956 at the Free Methodist Publishing House – both in Winona Lake. Why only that fall? We discovered that God was answering Janice’s deepest longing, to become a mother. (Sequences, you know – first a wife, then a mother.) Meanwhile between Gatke’s and the GI Bill, our needs were met. ($10 per week met out grocery needs at that time.)
Chapter 18

Seminary Years

Life in Seminary is far from dull...especially when one’s schedule is rather full. In the fall of 1956 our schedule ran as follows: Up at 6:00am, breakfast, “Prayers” (our designation of family devotions) and to work [Janice] by 7:00am. Beginning Greek class - 7:30am. (I had no Greek in college, so this was a ‘no credit’ course.) Home at 12:00 for the main meal of the day. (Janice had 1 hour to prepare, serve and return to work.) I went to work at 4:00pm, when Janice got off work, then arrived back at home at 9:30pm, in time to begin homework. Usually I fell asleep over the kitchen table/desk while studying, until Janice would remind me that I “would sleep more comfortably in bed than at the table.”

One special feature of working at Gatke’s was getting to know Peter Strasdings, a man who, with his wife, had emigrated from Latvia to America. Peter spoke very broken English. His wife spoke worse. Because of that, some of our co-workers considered them to be rather ignorant. Actually Peter could communicate in four languages (Latvian, German, Russian and English), while his wife had also French in her repertoire.

I certainly enjoyed endeavoring to speak German with Peter. He would teach me new vocabulary, correct my grammar and encourage me to keep learning German better. Since that time, I have found my limited ability in German has proven helpful in ministering to people of Germanic background.

Imagine my surprise when I discovered that David Lunney and Lewis Richards were in school also. We had sung together in the Street Meeting Quartet for two years while at Bryan College. Soon we connected with John Burke, another classmate, and sang as a quartet for the three years we were in school. I was able to sing my favorite part – bass. One of our opportunities took us to Port Huron, Michigan, the site of David Lunney’s home church. There we were involved in the worship service. The weather was extremely cold, and the heater on my
station wagon proved inadequate for the warming and defrosting task. But God blessed both the music and His Word.

During the first year at Grace, Janice and I had the joy of singing in a presentation of “My Heart Is Glad,” an Easter Cantata. My uncle, David Thornton, was the composer. My Grandfather, J.B. Thornton, had given him the Scriptural ‘story’ line.

We were wondering what we could do for Thanksgiving Dinner, when we received a turkey (along with a container of “spun honey”) for the holiday. Gatke’s gave all their workers this as an annual token of appreciation for their work.

That first Thanksgiving break, we drove to St. Paul, Minnesota, taking Lewis Richards to his wedding to Harriet Stanke, another Bryan schoolmate. I had been asked to stand as Best Man. We drove them back to Grace where they, too, shared in a “three-year honeymoon” during Seminary.

The summer of 1957 saw us back at Mansfield, working at Therm-O-Disc and actively involved in the church. I enjoyed singing in the church choir. I also played on the church league softball team. We were also excitedly awaiting the arrival of number one son. This came about in an interesting way.

David was scheduled to be born on Labor Day (September 2). That was also the day we needed to move back to Winona Lake for the middler year of school. Our doctor told her she should not travel that distance by car. Our friend, Earl Decker, not only was a pilot, but also an instructor. He had a student who needed to get some flying time on instrument flying, so Earl offered to fly Janice to Winona Lake, while I drove our car with trailer the 200 miles.

When we were about half way there, we had a flat tire on the trailer. (Did I mention that a college girl was to travel with me? She did.) It took us about two hours to locate another tire, because it was an unusual size. Meanwhile, Janice had arrived in Winona Lake, airsick, because the windows were covered for instrumental flying, and the pilot was new at this game.
She was greatly relieved, when we finally arrived. My sister, Martha, a licensed nurse, had come to give us support. She promptly became the “carrier of the other end of whatever” as we moved into an upstairs apartment. Two days later, she attended Janice through the delivery of our first born, a son. We decided to name him David Charles. The hospital was in Goshen, Indiana.

On the way home from the hospital, I stopped at a well-known place in Winona Lake – the Eskimo Inn (now long since ‘deceased’), where I placed a long distance call to my parents in Greenfield, Illinois. When my mother came to the phone, I proceeded to sing: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given…” I never did get to the “government…” part. Then I told her that she had a new grandson, named David Charles Thornton.

That school year (1957-58) was the year I was required to preach my “Middler Sermon,” which was required of every second year (middler) student at Grace. I had the special experience of writing this sermon out. I was graded on content, presentation, and just about anything else either the professors or the students could think of (just kidding). My title: “When God Remembered.” My text: Genesis 8:1. My theme: God doesn’t have a short memory, as people often do. His promises are never forgotten. He will fulfill them in His own perfect time.

We lived in the Doric Apartments in Winona Lake through the summer of 1958. I kept working at Gatke. Jim Smals, a friend from college days, had been a student pastor. He graduated and returned to his home in Virginia, so he was looking for someone to take leadership of a small church down at Lawton, Indiana. Janice and I went one Sunday to meet the people, and they were amenable to our coming. So, beginning at the end of my middler year, I had the privilege of preaching every Sunday night at the Lawton Christian Church. This continued for twelve months, until I graduated. At that time, Lewis Richards assumed the pastoral duties. After graduation, he moved to the community and worked as full-time pastor.

Daniel Earl was born during my final (1958-59) year at Seminary. This time, Alice was the one who came to give initial
assistance as we ushered son number two into the human race. Janice still loved being a “Mama,” as well as being a homemaker. During the summer before Daniel’s birth, she often brought David, in a baby stroller, to meet me after work. She also loved working outdoors in yard or garden. I had a tree platform on which I frequently did reading or other facets of study. Some of my fellow students (or their wives) may have thought I was an ogre to make her work while I sat in my tree and read. She really did like to do it. (Just ask her sometime.)

Christmas of 1958 carries with it a fond memory. We drove to Greenfield, Illinois to visit my parents and siblings. I had no time to cash my paycheck before we left for vacation. So we left, with sons David and Daniel along. Janice had baby food, but we had no lunch packed. Upon checking we discovered that we had a total of 52 cents cash between us. So we stopped at a grocery store and purchased a loaf of bread, some cheese and peanut butter. I recall having less than a nickel left over. We ate in the car as we proceeded on our way.

We arrived in Greenfield, to discover that several other siblings, plus their offspring, had already arrived. Upon entering the living room, I discovered an intriguing scene – Dad had set up a small electric train set in the middle of the floor. He was also showing his grandchildren how to run it. Unfortunately (for the grandchildren) he seemed to have forgotten them in his enjoyment of “driving the train,” so they sat there with longing looks, waiting for Grandpa to turn the controls over to them. We had a great vacation. I cashed my check and we made it home fine.

The big thing that faced us students third year was the critical monograph. This was the final work of the Seminary student and gave an indication of his ability to think, study and write in the arena of theological studies. While that in itself was enough to cause stress, our class was called together at the beginning of our senior year and Dr. Hoyt (the Dean) gave us some very clear instructions. First, students for the previous several years had taken increasing advantage of leniency toward
deadlines in getting their Critical Monograph work in. Next, the
time had come to require promptness in fulfilling the required
work. This called for severe penalties for failure to keep to the
schedule. Then finally, if any student failed to make the
scheduled deadlines, he would be unable to graduate with his
class.

As I progressed through the year, it became obvious that I
would be unable to meet the first major scheduled date for my
work. The only solution I could come up with was to complete
the classroom requirements as scheduled, then write the
monograph so I could graduate later. I went to Dr. Hoyt’s office
to talk with him. After I had told him my dilemma, he reflected a
bit, then said: “Now, Brother Thornton, may I remind you that
the word “Grace” isn’t a part of the name of our school for no
reason…” He then proceeded to inform me that those drastic
warnings were intended to serve as a prod for those students who
were prone to abuse the system and endeavor to slide by. He
concluded by encouraging me to get my work done as quickly as
possible, and that I would not be penalized for tardiness.

What an example of grace in action! I have never
forgotten that lesson. A man who represented the utmost in
commitment to excellence in study, work, schedules, and
Christian service; who had little patience with slackers; who
demanded that things be done both well and on time, showed
kindness to a me a student, who wasn’t ‘measuring up.’ Since
that time, I have endeavored to demonstrate the same
thoughtfulness and awareness of the struggles that others go
through in their desire to follow Jesus Christ.

Janice typed my regular assignments on a portable
typewriter, but the thought of “no mistakes allowed” was too
much. (Neither Janice nor I have any training in typing.) So June
(Zehrung) Dixon, a Bryan classmate, typed my monograph.

So Seminary came to an end. I did graduate…and the
monograph was done. I think of two added items that may be of
interest:
The first has to do with the graduation exercises themselves. As the day approached, one of the constant pressures was that of getting collateral reading finished. I am a rather slow reader, so these reading assignments were a bit onerous. As an example, we were assigned 1,000 pages of collateral reading each semester…in systematic theology alone. Other courses had differing amounts, but I do not recall any that were less than 500.

As the day approached (perhaps a week away), Janice woke one morning and shared a dream she had. Perhaps “nightmare” is a better description. Well, she dreamed that it was Commencement Day, and we students were lined up in caps and gowns for the processional. So far, so good. But…I was reading collateral! The processional processed. We went in and sat down, and I was still reading. All through the commencement address, my nose was buried in the book. Then the giving out of degrees began. Fortunately, Thornton is near the end of the alphabet, so my name wasn’t called until almost last of all. When my name was announced, I said: “Just a moment, please. I’m completing the last paragraph.” Janice told me that she breathed a huge sigh of relief, because I had made it...finished the course...done all my collateral.

The second had to wait a few years, until we were living in the parsonage at Buena Vista, Virginia. Daniel had recently begun his ongoing love affair with books. One day, as he was looking over my “library” (which was contained in a bookcase that contained three shelves, he saw my copy of my critical monograph. He asked me what that book was. I answered, telling him what he had already seen on the binding, that I had written it in Seminary. He then proudly announced that his Daddy had written a book.

I, Charles G. Thornton, was now a published author. Never mind that only three copies were ever made; that very few, if any, people would ever look at it; that it wouldn’t rank especially high among many others of its kind. Just remember this: “My Daddy wrote a book!” That still stirs my heart. Why?
Because I felt that my son thought I was someone who had something to say.

But back to Winona Lake and the end of Seminary…we left Indiana. We moved back to Mansfield, Ohio. I worked again at Therm-O-Disc, while waiting to get into the Summer Institute of Linguistics for training in Bible translation techniques and skills. Such, however, was not to be, as history will demonstrate.

--- Snippets ---

Harold ‘Hod’ Bolesky had hired me to work at Therm-O-Disc. Upon graduation from Seminary, he and his wife gave me a new suit. Then he guaranteed my salary at Galion. God has His people who serve Him in wonderful ways.

That summer and into the winter I taught the youth Sunday School class and helped with the youth program, sang in the choir and played softball. It was that summer that I became extremely conscious of the (sometimes) lack of true sportsmanship often found among Christians. Jim Dickson, a fellow student at Grace, worked that summer on a crew constructing the Interstate Highway past Mansfield. Jim got a team together to play our church team. I was chagrined to observe how many times our (GBC) guys criticized the refs or disputed their calls. Meanwhile Jim’s team, composed of a number of unsaved guys, just plain old ‘had a good time.’ They accepted calls without question. They were there to have fun, not to “win at all costs.’

I have wondered, at times, how much our attitudes may have affected the openness of those fellows to the Gospel. By the way, Jim went on to become a Navy Chaplain. I think his willingness to work with that road crew revealed something of what it takes to effectively minister to people in the military.
MILEPOST #7

Galion, Ohio
Chapter 19

Direction

After having completed Seminary, what was the next step to be? You have already seen what transpired immediately after school. Now, here is the next step.

During the first year at Grace Seminary, Chuck Corwin, a missionary to Japan, spoke in Chapel. I began to think that, perhaps, God would want me to follow my father and grandfather in serving Him in Japan. In the second year, however, my interests shifted to Bible translation. My love for modern languages, coupled with a delight in biblical languages, prompted me to consider studying at Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) following Seminary.

Imagine my delight to learn that I could receive GI Bill finances for 48 months (two days education for each day of military service). This meant that I had another school year (9 months) of eligibility. However, when I contacted the authorities, I was informed that they considered schooling at SIL to be a change in direction of my education from ministerial to educational, so I could not receive GI Bill for that purpose.

Since I would have no GI Bill support, I anticipated working for a time following Seminary, and then applying to SIL early the following year (1960). Janice and I moved back to Mansfield, OH (remembering to take David and Daniel along), where I was able to work for Therm-O-Disc again.

In January of 1960, I sat down for the purpose of writing to the SIL office to set things in motion for attending the next session. I can still remember my chagrin, as I endeavored to write that letter. I sat. I placed paper and pen before me. I picked up the pen…but…I was unable to put words on the paper. (Now, doesn’t that sound silly?) On two additional occasions, I tried to write SIL. It was to no avail.

Then…early in February, Pastor Bernie Schneider asked me if I would consider leading a home Bible study in Galion (a neighboring town, about 16 miles away). I was delighted for the
opportunity. So, with two families (four adults and two children) as the core group, one from the Mansfield GBC and the other from the Wooster, OH GBC, we began. God blessed, and in the next three months we grew to an attendance of the mid-twenties.

*Then…* Pastor Bernie again approached me. (I was still working at Therm-O-Disc, singing in the church choir, teaching the senior high class and sharing in the leadership of the BYF [Brethren Youth Fellowship].)

Would I consider moving to Galion with my family, for the purpose of starting a new church there?

Oh, and by the way, one of the men of the church had a deep desire to see churches planted, and had made a personal, anonymous commitment to underwrite our salary, if we went.

This was yet another instance in which a Scripture from Genesis has proven to be very special to me. When Abraham’s servant arrived in Haran, searching for a bride for Isaac, he prayed. What an audacious request! The answer to that request would be the sign that the wife for Isaac, the woman he was sent to “bring back home,” stood before him. While he was praying Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel, arrived. Upon being asked to “Give me a drink,” she did so, and then provided water for his camels also. Later when asked about this, the servant replied: “…I, being in the way, the Lord led me…” (Genesis 24:27).

**Snippets**

Genesis 24:27 has served as an anchor for me throughout my life. God has never failed to reveal the next step for me. The ‘door’ frequently remained closed until the moment I needed to enter. The key was to be “in the way” (i.e. - doing what was at hand at the moment). God would take care of the future. I can definitely affirm that, whether in the “When?” or the “Where?” of a change of pastorates, “…I, being in the way, the Lord led me…”

We looked around and found a place to begin holding worship services – a storefront building one block from the center of town. Excitement reigned as we put down linoleum to cover
the oiled wooden flooring. We built a ten inch high platform on one end for the pulpit. We rigged up a means of dividing the 18’ x 33’ main room into four “classrooms (students could hear at least one other teacher than their own, if they chose), while the 12’ x 15’ entryway became the Beginner’s Classroom.

Meanwhile, Deborah Elaine had joined our family. May 13, 1960 was the day. Mansfield General Hospital was the place. The night we completed the linoleum project, we held our first prayer meeting in the building. As we prepared to leave, Mrs. Gulick took Deborah to the car (parked at the curb) and laid her in the front seat. Just as she straightened up, a car whipped around the corner, smashed into the rear of our car, and then went roaring down the street. Deborah (possibly two weeks old) was unhurt. Mrs. Gulick just escaped being hit as the car lurched forward under the impact. We promptly had another, short, prayer of thanks for God’s protection.

Now for “the rest of the story”: The drunk driver proceeded one block, made a left turn, and was stopped in front of the police station. He was held accountable for the error of his ways.
Chapter 20

Galion GBC

Now! At last! I am a genuine, ‘for real’ pastor. That is, if you discount the year I preached at Lawton Christian Church.

During that year (1958-59) I held my first two funerals – one was a baby, and the other a 12 year-old girl. How does one prepare for a funeral, especially when it is an entirely new experience? I’m not even sure that we had dealt with funerals yet, in the courses on Practical Theology. A friend recommended that I procure a copy of The Brethren Minister’s Handbook. I did. It was most helpful. I followed its guidelines and, with quiet guidance by the Funeral Director, ‘made it.’ I began to recognize that sorrowing people are more concerned that the pastor cares about them than that the service runs “slick and smooth.” Of course, a well-ordered service is part of that concern.

Incidentally, that small black Handbook still is in use some 49 years later. I have maintained my records of weddings (to date – 69) and funerals (203) in it.

Well, back to Galion. The Ed White and Kenneth Gulick families were our core families initially. Soon our new neighbors, the Herman Fisher family, Mina Keller (a widow lady), the John Sells family and others swelled the number. During our time in Galion, we had the privilege of touching seven alcoholics to some extent for Christ.

For the next three years we lived and worked in Galion. The church grew to an average attendance of 45. Actually we built it up to 60 three different times, but there is a truism about Americans and space. Because of our love of ‘room,’ we refuse to be crowded. Unless there is some hope for relief...fairly soon, attendance will tend to settle at about 80% of a building’s capacity. Sixty people crowded our building, so 45 or so was a comfortable number.

We had four kids in our youth group. I took them to district youth rallies in our red four-door Dodge Dart.
Some of my experiences there have been both interesting and instructional. For example, Mina Keller, a widow (in her 83 years of life she had outlived three husbands), asked if I would come to her home to discuss theology with the Seventh Day Adventist pastor. Mina had some questions for us both. When I arrived, I discovered that he was about 50 years old. I was now all of 27, in my first pastorate, and had never before been asked to ‘defend’ what I believed.

Mina would ask a question, and he would take several minutes to explain his answer. Then it was my turn. It seemed that every time I came to a comma in my argument, he jumped in to continue his. I only knew to constantly refer every answer I made to Scripture. Eventually it was over! Phew! (I hoped I would never have to do that again.) I went home with a sense of having lost the battle, as well as Mina. But she kept coming to our church. I concluded that she loved our relationships between people, as well as our commitment to Scripture and therefore stayed with us.

In the summer of 1960, I experienced my first district church camp. My experiences on staff at Tadmor in the summers of 1949-51, plus the week at Camp Beckwith in 1952, gave me a foundation to build on. Actually, I began using songs I had learned from Paul Mellow (the Director at Tadmor) as part of my repertoire. Songs such as: “The Jaybird Song,” “Fish and Chips and Vinegar,” and “Boom, Boom, Ain’t It Great to Be Crazy?” caught on quickly. I was able to use my guitar also. It was so enjoyable to be able to use the abilities I had for God. Not just the fun, sometimes silly, songs, but also the more serious ones at chapel and campfire. I served as lifeguard as well.

The next spring I was chosen to be a member of the District Youth Committee. That was a ministry I thoroughly enjoyed for the next 35 years, in various capacities in different districts. In camps I have served as counselor, lifeguard, song leader, Bible teacher and director. In the District Youth Rallies I have served as judge for various areas of competition. I also was District Quizmaster for Bible Quizzing a number of years. One
year the Southeast District Quiz Team won the National competition. Since I was its coach, I shared the trip to Puerto Rico the following spring.

Along that line, I had the unique privilege of being National Quizmaster for four years.

On September 13, 1961, Jonathan was born (our second Ohioan) at the Galion Hospital. Dr. Horowitz was our doctor through those years.

That same month I took the next step toward ‘official’ recognition as a pastor. I was examined at Camp Luz, near Rittman, Ohio. The occasion was the 1961 District Pastors’ Annual Retreat. For me, this was a very significant event. The trial of Benedict Arnold was history. George Washington crossing the Delaware, while very real and significant, was still history. On the other hand, my examination was something I felt…I sweated through…I wondered if I would “pass.” Things like a) “Give a brief outline of prophetic teaching regarding the future,” b) “Define and distinguish between the following terms as they relate to salvation: justification, sanctification, glorification,” or c) “Explain the following aspects of the ministry of the Holy Spirit: convicting, baptizing, filling, teaching, ‘gifting,’ empowering” were fairly easy. The questions about Brethren Distinctives were where the ‘rub’ began. I knew that the men before me were keen on maintaining pure doctrinal teaching in the churches. Therefore, I expected to be ‘grilled’ on the subjects that distinguish the Grace Brethren from other denominations.

Later on I thought of pulling a “Paul” on them. That is, I might have made a statement such as: “Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day” (Acts 24:21). That might have gotten them arguing among themselves, and let me off the hook, at least for a little while. But…as usual, my moments of inspiration come about 2-3 hours late. Beside that, I don’t think that’s what Jesus would do.

Anyway, I passed. Well, sort of. After consultation, I heard the “verdict.” The report to my church (Galion GBC)
would authorize my licensure. But…the Examining Board
desired that I make a study of three aspects of Brethren
distinctives, and report the next year at the retreat.

Twelve months later (September, 1962) I sat again before
the same body of men. After considering my verbal report of the
results of my study on the three topics, they continued their
approval of my licensure, but asked that I return the following
year, having written four papers. However, before that time came
around, God moved us to Buena Vista, Virginia.

In the meanwhile, I had some special opportunities in the
interest of District Missions endeavor. The first one involved
spending a day in Columbus, Ohio with a view to seeing whether
the time was right to begin planting a new church in that city. I
was able to make several contacts, but nothing resulted from that
endeavor. It was to be another man, David Hocking, who would
pastor what was to become the largest GBC in the United States.

The second District Missions endeavor went a bit further.
Once a week I drove to Mount Vernon, Ohio to lead a home
Bible study. Mel Hobson, a friend, fellow student (both in college
and seminary), and now a fellow pastor, attended and supported
this endeavor. That also ended without a new church being
planted. God’s timing is not always ours, for, 30 years later there
was a church started there.

During the time at Galion, I experienced the second
greatest joy for a believer. I had the privilege of introducing
someone to Christ. (I had done this before, in other contexts –
camp, jail services, etc., but not as a pastor. Mr. Carmel was a
recovering alcoholic who began attending our small church. He
was retired after a successful business career. He had so many
things ‘going for him.’ He was just lost. Whenever I came home
after visiting him, Janice would say: “You have been visiting Mr.
Carmel.” She knew, because I came home smelling of tobacco
smoke.

One time I brought the good news: “Mr. Carmel accepted
Christ today!” Afterward he would give his testimony by saying
that he had been “born three times: once as a baby…the second
time when he began recovering from alcohol…and now as a child of God.”

When I baptized John Sells, it was a memorable occasion. John was another recovering alcoholic (I had contact with seven alcoholics during our stay in Galion). He had contracted cancer of the larynx from smoking, with the result that his larynx had to be removed. He breathed through a hole in his throat. Now I was to immerse him in water for baptism. On top of that, he informed me that if he got so much as half a teaspoon of water down his “new” breathing passage, he would drown.

Question: Is this a situation that would warrant making an exception to the “immersion” part of the baptismal act? (After all, the early – second century - writings indicated that there were recognized exceptions to immersion.) But John was adamant. “Besides, I’ll just hold my finger over the hole and you (Pastor) will have nothing to worry about.”

So, I baptized him. Later I discovered that I forgot to take my watch off, so it was also trine-immersed.

In September (1962) son David took the first major step of his young life … elementary school. Our home on Winchester Road was separated from the elementary school by an alley and a neighbor’s yard. Janice had taken David to the school to enroll him, so when the big day came, he already knew where to go and how to get there. He said a jaunty “Goodbye,” and walked away, while a heart-broken, sobbing mother watched him leave.

On January 8, 1963, Rebekah was born in the Galion hospital. Dr. Horowitz was so proud that he walked the halls of the hospital, carrying Rebekah and showing her to both employees and patients. Why? She was the largest girl baby he had every delivered – 10# 4 ½ oz.

In a month we moved to Buena Vista, Virginia. But that’s the next chapter.
MILEPOST #8

Buena Vista, Virginia
Chapter 21

Redirection #1

Every pastor faces the issue of change, sooner or later. If it doesn’t result in a move, it at least results in some evaluation of his ministry and whether he thinks God may be moving him. As our third year at Galion drew near its completion, I began this process.

During these years, our church attendance had grown to the capacity of the building (60-65, when packed). This had taken place on three different occasions. Each time we had reached that number, attendance trailed off to the 40-45 level.

We looked for property to purchase and build a church home. And that resulted in an interesting situation.

We looked at several possible sites. None of them was ideal. But there was one that appeared to be promising…at first. I had talked with the owner, and was initially enthusiastic about the possibility. Then I discovered the primary difficulty – it was land-locked (that is, there was no access to the property except across a neighbor’s land). When I told the owner that we would not be able to purchase the property, she was adamant that we had established a verbal contract with her. If we reneged on our commitment, she would take us to court.

Fortunately our church was a Home Missions Church (that is, we were under contract to the Brethren Home Missions Council). Our contract stated that no property could be bought without Home Mission’s approval.

Finally she relented, and we were “off the hook.”

This was one of the matters that led me to sense my inability to lead the church farther. I considered seeking another pastorate. This was an entirely new matter for me to consider. I once again was in position where the words: “I, being in the way, the Lord led me…” (Genesis 24:27).

In late October of 1963, I received a phone call from Buena Vista, Virginia. I was invited to candidate at the First Brethren Church there.
What a surprise! I had had no contact with Buena Vista (to my recollection). “But God” … (two of my favorite words). I learned later that Leon Myers, a fellow pastor in Mansfield, Ohio, had candidated at Buena Vista. When he turned down their call, he suggested that they might contact me. Furthermore, Jim Smals was a member of the church, and he knew me, both from college and seminary. (Remember, I followed his ministry at Lawton.)

In light of my concern regarding the place of service, I accepted the invitation.

There was, however, a bit of a challenge: Janice was pregnant with Rebekah… and the due date was December 8. Since it seemed a bit much for her to travel, I arranged to go down by myself to meet the people and preach at the church. (I do not suggest that as ideal for candidating a potential pastor – First Timothy 3 informs us that his family and “Frau” are very important elements in a pastor’s qualifying to serve. I think it is important to meet and observe the potential pastor’s family.)

On Sunday, November 4th, I preached in the morning service. We enjoyed a carry-in dinner, which was followed by a meeting with the Board for interview and questions. After the evening service, I was excused to step outside (the weather in Virginia in mid-November is mild) while the congregation met to vote. In a short time I was called in and informed of the vote (something like 100 ‘yea’ and 5 ‘nay’). I asked for a couple weeks to consider the matter.

Then back home again.

Now what do I do? The sheer size of the church scared me – an auditorium that seated 500, a church membership of 424, Sunday A.M. attendance of 220, and Sunday School attendance of 330. And I was ministering in a room that seated 60.

My knee-jerk reaction was to decline the invitation. I did, however, seek council before responding to the Buena Vista church. In the interim, I resigned from the Galion church the following Sunday. “Why?” you may ask. I realized that God has no problem in providing a place for me. Therefore I proceeded on
that basis to resign, depending on God to open the next door.

Fortunately, God had sent to our church the Ralph Wiley family. Ralph was then Chaplain at the Marion Correctional Institution in Marion, Ohio. He had formerly been pastor of two churches. I shall never forget his wise counsel: “Chuck, remember…if Satan can’t get you out of God’s will through seeking a ‘bigger, better or higher’ place, he will defeat you through a sense of inadequacy for such a position. Don’t reject the call simply because you think it is too big for you. If God is in this, He will provide.”

To summarize: 1) I felt I should leave Galion, 2) I was asked to candidate at Buena Vista, 3) I felt that Buena Vista was probably “not” the place I would go, 4) I resigned, anticipating that God would provide the next place, 5) I later accepted the call to Virginia, where, for the next six years we lived and served.

One additional item regarding such changes: I have a basic conviction that whenever one understands what he believes God would have him do, the quicker he gets “at it,” the better. So, in my years of ministry I have resigned from seven churches. Four of those seven instances were without knowing where the next step was to be. “But God is faithful…”
Rebekah was born on January 8, 1963, not on December 8, as prognosticated. When she was just a month old, we moved. And therein hangs a tale also.

When I accepted the call to Buena Vista, I had a serious talk with God. You see, this was a pretty major step for me.

Remember that I am now going to a HUGE (in my mind) church. So, I did something that seemed pretty rash at the time – I “put out a fleece.” (Do or should Christians do that? I knew that Gideon did. Was it lack of faith to do so?) All sorts of questions ran through my mind.

As I talked with God, I admitted that this was something new in my experience. Would He please recognize that I didn’t have all the answers, but that I did want to please Him? Then I made the BIG request: As proof that I was doing the right thing, would He grant that the Galion church would not be one single Sunday without a pastor?

Now God had thirteen weeks to ease my concerns. Three months has been the normally accepted amount of notice to give a church when a pastor resigns. I asked for that.

Well…7 weeks went by without a nibble – no contacts. The time was getting short. Then…Alva Conner, a roommate from College, contacted us. He was interested. He could come to speak in two weeks. That would leave only four more until we move to Virginia.

He came, candidated, and was called to be the new pastor. Not only that, but he could come in two weeks – two weeks before the deadline set by Chuck “Desiring Assurance” Thornton.

So we moved. It was a cold, wintry day when we loaded the moving van in Ohio. We then drove as far as Winchester, VA, where we stayed in a motel. Our four children slept sideways on one double bed, while Janice and I (and Baby Rebekah) made good use of the other one. The next morning we
awakened, and Daniel asked: “Where is the kitchen?” “We are not quite yet at our new home, Son,” was the reply.

We drove down the Shenandoah Valley to our new home. As we came into Buena Vista from across the Maury River, I said to Janice, “This is our street.” (Not too good for timing.) It was our street, just the wrong end. The first thing we saw on “our street” was a row of old, weather-beaten homes right next to the highway. Then we saw the paper mill. (Of all the entrances to Buena Vista, this was the least attractive.) We pressed on to the parsonage, where the moving van arrived just as we did.

Janice was immediately immersed in directing the movers in placing furniture in a house she had never seen before. (I admit that my endeavors to describe our new home fell far short of adequate.) It didn’t take long for the children to be “at home,” especially when they met Carl, our neighbor’s son, a boy their own age. Ronnie and Cathy Smals were other neighbor children who lived just down the street from us also.

We arrived on Wednesday. I began my work at prayer meeting that same night. On Friday there was a youth rally in Roanoke, to which I went along with the youth. My introduction to them was a bit surprising. When I got on the bus, I placed my hat (at that time I had a regular, genuine, dress hat) on the front seat, while I walked back to meet the various young people. Suddenly a shout went up! A late arrival entered the bus, saw the empty front seat, and promptly sat down…right on my hat. Now, what would the new preacher do? How would he react to having his hat sat on? She was embarrassed. I was delighted. This gave me an opportunity to relax with the kids. For the next six years I had the joy of being involved with them in various ways.

Janice remembers well the first WMC Rally she attended. Being unaccustomed to the southern accent, she felt at a loss when speaking with the ladies. But they quickly came to love and appreciate her. She also quickly found a niche in the music department (as she has done throughout our entire ministry).

I was able to be active on the District Mission Board. Looking for opportunities to plant new churches has been one of
my joys. I also served on the District Youth Committee. This involved youth rallies, district competition in Bible quizzing, music, preaching, creative writing, and such. I was coach for the District Quiz Team several years, including the year the Southeast District won the National Competition. The following Easter school break, we were sent to Puerto Rico for a week.

What a treat! We were there when the Billy Graham Crusade was held in Puerto Rico. Each night our youth served as ushers and helpers. During the days we served the Grace Brethren Church in any way possible. Of course we were able to do some sight-seeing as well. Two events remain in my memory. The first is the rain forest with its huge trees and other verdant growth. The second was the trip we took to a town near San Juan. There we watched in amazement as, on Palm Sunday, the townspeople brought the statues of the saints from the local Catholic Church. They then paraded them around the town square with music and great excitement. The outstanding icon was a glass enclosed statue of a dead Christ lying on his back. The next one, which may have received even more honor, was a large statue of Mary seated on a throne, carried by a number of men. How great is the spiritual darkness in that land! Our brief stay enabled us to help bring the light of Jesus Christ into that darkness.

On August 28, 1964, our sixth child was born in the Andrew Jackson memorial Hospital in Lexington, Virginia. Mary Elizabeth became a source of great joy to Janice and me (as did the other five). She was destined, in the wisdom of God, to also be the source of some incredible sorrow and pain. But that is for later.

That fall (1964) I approached Pastor Kenneth Teague for counsel regarding my quest for licensure in the FGBC. I told him of my assignment to report to the Northern Ohio District Examining Board for further examination. What should I do?

Kenneth smiled as I related my story. He then told me that he had received my “dossier” by mail, along with a letter of explanation from Northern Ohio. He then proceeded to walk to
his file cabinet, lift out a (rather large – between ¾ and 1 inch thick) folder, which he said was that dossier. He then placed it in his ‘circular file’ and recommended that I simply wait for a year or so, then have my church request examination for ordination. By that time, our pastors would know me well enough to give a fair evaluation. That I did, with the result that in 1966 I received Ordination papers from the First Brethren Church of Buena Vista, Virginia. Interestingly enough, I have never been asked to produce those papers in the subsequent 41 years.

I must add, however, that I was one “cool customer” during my ordination examination. It was like this: That morning we had a regular monthly Ministerium meeting in Roanoke, VA. At noon we went to a local restaurant to eat. I rode with some other pastors. As I stretched to get into the rear seat of a two-door car, I heard a ripping sound. Oops! Sure enough, the seam in the crotch of my pants ripped from fly to belt line. Fortunately I was wearing a sport coat, which I promptly tied around my waist to conceal the damage. After lunch we returned to the church for the examination. I had nothing to change into, so I say through the exam in ‘cool splendor.’ Final note…I passed.

While we lived in Virginia, there were a couple of memorable experiences I had in District Missions. The first was a trip to Atlanta, GA on a survey trip to see about planting a new church there. Bill Byers, pastor at the Hollins, VA GBC, drove his car to Atlanta, while I flew down to meet him. We devoted the better part of two days looking for suitable areas as well as talking to contacts about the possibilities. I drove Bill’s car back to Virginia, while Bill stayed to do more looking. He flew back home later.

As I drove, I began thinking about the strawberry pie that the Big Boy chain of restaurants served. When noon came, I passed a number of eating places because I wanted a Big Boy pie. One o’clock…two o’clock…no Big Boy. But I pressed on. Finally, at 3:30 p.m. I reached Roanoke…and the long sought Big Boy. I went in, sat down, received my glass of water, and waited to give my order. When I finally gave it, the waitress
The second district mission incident relates to my driving over 350 miles round trip every two weeks to lead a home Bible Study in Woodbridge, VA. Our dream was to begin a Brethren church in that community. We discovered that there was insufficient motivation among the people who lived there to “make it happen.” How often God sees fit to let the fulfillment of a dream be dependent on the drive of the dreamers.

One day I received a phone call from “Mustard” Graybill. He was owner of a Men’s Wear Shop in Buena Vista. He told me to come down and pick out a new suit. Now that nonplussed me. I had no idea where that came from. I later learned that Leonard Blackwell (a plumber in our church) and Love Staton (my barber) told Mustard they would pay for my suit. After I had picked up my new suit, Mustard told me I should have gotten some shirts, ties, underwear, even shoes and socks. After all, Leonard and Love were paying for it.

Leonard was the man who (when he learned I would be away for a week for evangelistic meetings) loaned me his brand new Yellow (with black top) Ford T-Bird. When I arrived at the church location, I was embarrassed to park it in front of the storefront building where we would be meeting. Instead I parked a block and a half away. When we arrived at the pastor’s home, I parked the car for the week. I feared I would appear to be the “$300 suit-wearing, Cadillac-driving, super evangelist” rather than a man who simply loved God and sought to faithfully preach His Word.

In the summer of 1967, our church planned our first church family overnight retreat at Camp Tuk-A-Way (our district campground near Blacksburg, Va.). We had such a good time that we planned for another the next year. So in 1968 we planned a three-day retreat. This was a great success. In fact we were
hoping to have a week-long all-church camp in 1969.

In 1968 we also had another first – we brought a summer intern on staff. I had the privilege of going to Grace Schools in Indiana to interview and select a man to serve as intern with me for ten weeks during the summer. God directed me to Dan Hammers, a seminary student, who came with his wife Sherry. The sum of $100 per week plus a basement (which a family in the church provided free) was the inducement. I am satisfied that Dan came because he could get experience in ministry by that means. He directed our VBS. He planned our youth activities for the summer. His philosophy of ministry coincided with mine. The ninth weekend was the capstone of the youth program. On that weekend he led a campout, which included a strong urging of the youth to make themselves available to God for His service.

The summer was so profitable, that for years after, interns came to Buena Vista to both serve and be sent on to further ministry as servants of God.

One important note: For the next few years, the youth who attended that campout were the hub of the youth program at the Buena Vista church. Some of them went on to serve as church officers in later years. Dan was humanly responsible for this.

Before we leave Buena Vista, there is one additional family note I should make. We often went for picnic lunches during the summer. A favorite for our children was the boat locks on the Maury River (now ruins from a canal system of long ago). There we would play in the water, climb the rocks and enjoy Janice’s picnic lunches.
MILEPOST #9

Lanham, Maryland
Chapter 23

Redirection #2

One Sunday during the late spring of 1968, we had a couple from Washington, D.C. visit the church. Upon meeting them we learned that they were in the area on a weekend vacation and, being Brethren, had visited our church. Good! We always were happy when people came to visit.

A short while later I received a telephone call from Ivan Munch. Ivan who? O, yes, Ivan Munch, who had visited our church with his wife, Margaret, a few weeks earlier. He asked if I would consider being a candidate for pastor of the First Brethren Church of Washington, D.C.

My quick answer was no…for several reasons: 1) we were experiencing a great summer with the Hammers as interns, 2) we had plans in place for Jerry Falwell to speak for a week of meetings in the fall, and 3) I had not thought of making a change.

A short time later Ivan called again. “Would we consider meeting with the Board of the church” “No, I see no reason to do so.” “Well, will you at least be willing to come and preach for us some Sunday?” “Janice and I have never been to Washington, D.C. together. Perhaps we could come for a weekend visit and, while we are there speak in your church.” “Great! When can you come?” “I’ll get back to you within two days.”

Two days later: “How about the Sunday after the 4th of July.”

“Wonderful, we’ll be expecting you.”

So, the red carpet was rolled out for us. The Munches took us to The Harbor Restaurant (an elite restaurant on Chesapeake Bay at Annapolis, Maryland). There we were, well, we were (not ‘wined,’ but) ‘dined.’ Can you imagine someone ordering steak in a seafood restaurant? Now you can.

We stayed, preached and went home.

Another call. “We want you to talk with our Board.”

“I see no reason to do so.”

“What will it take for you to meet with us?”
“I suppose I would feel obligated if you extended me a call.”

Later on there came another call. “The Board has voted to request you meeting with us.”

“We can come the Monday before National Conference. We will leave a day early, stop by to see you folks, and then proceed on to Conference.”

“We’ll expect you…and plan to stay at our home.”

So, we met with the Board. After some discussion, we indicated that we would let them know our answer in two weeks. The first of those weeks was spent at National Conference, with a lot of questions running through our minds. Then the second week back at home.

This was completely different from leaving Galion. There, I felt I should leave. Here I am being pursued by another church. I feel we are entering the best period of my time in Buena Vista, while in Galion I was at an impasse. The pros and cons seem to be balanced between the churches. What shall it be?

Ah-h-h! I have it now! No! Another fleece? Yes, another fleece. What is it this time? Well, since everything is equal, including the differential in salary (we estimated that the increase in salary would just balance out the difference in cost of living between Buena Vista and Washington, D.C.), we asked the D.C. church to consider raising the salary by $1,000 per year.

Then we prayed: “Lord, You are able to make the request seem either impossible or reasonable to the D.C. church people. We rest on You to be in charge of the outcome.”

On Dan Hammer’s last Sunday with us we had a “going away night.” That afternoon Ivan Munch called: “Our church voted to increase the salary. Do you accept?”

“Tell the people I will be resigning tonight. We will anticipate coming in three months.”

There are three family memories that come to mind just now: 1) When we told the children their big question was: “Is there a McDonald’s close?” “Yes, within two miles.” 2) 1968 was a Presidential election year, and Daniel said: “My Daddy is a
candidate for President.” 3) Driving the 440 mile round trip to Lanham, Maryland (site of our new home) in a VW Bug, with all six children plus three wallpaper books in order to pick out paper.
Chapter 24

Washington, D.C. FBC

Sunday, November 17, was our last day at Buena Vista. That evening, two men from the Washington, D.C. church drove down to move us north. Monday we loaded the trucks. Tuesday evening our family drove north. We had planned to tow our VW Bug, but were unable to secure a tow bar. So-o-o, I led the way in the VW, while Janice drove the Dodge Station Wagon behind me. She is a careful driver. She is a very cautious driver. She is a great follower. In fact she followed so closely that whenever I pulled out to pass, she did the same...at the same time. (We smile about it now.) Then it began raining. But we arrived...to begin the next phase of the saga.

On Wednesday we unloaded the truck. On Thursday afternoon, Bea Gardner called. (She is the wife of the Moderator of the church, who also drove one of the trucks to move us.) They wanted me to go with them, on Thursday, to do some shopping. I was surprised when they took me to a very fine Men’s Wear Store. Frank, who always wore suits in his work as an insurance salesman, bought all his suits there. He instructed his salesman to fit me out properly. He also insisted that I was to be able to pick up the suit on Saturday (two days away, when the normal time was closer to two weeks). “Yes sir, Mr. Gardner.”

So, on my first Sunday in the new location, I was dressed well, thanks to a couple of God’s special people who never breathed a word to anyone about this deed of kindness. A word of explanation might be in order here. My last good suit was the one purchased by Leonard Blackwell and Love Staton. The previous one was on sale, marked down from $27.50 to $20.00. It had become so thin that the hairs on my legs could be seen through the cloth.

The Apostle Paul declared (Philippians 4:12) that he had “learned to be abased and to abound.” I learned by this suit experience that God may provide so that in a situation where
people are more aware of clothing, his shepherd would not be an embarrassment to his flock.

The Greater Washington Prophetic Conference (GWPC) was a biennial event. It was a three-way cooperative effort between the Washington Bible College (WBC), the American Board of Missions to the Jews (ABMJ), and three or four cooperating churches, of which our church was one. We brought some of the finest prophecy speakers to speak. The teaching was consistently pre-millennial and pre-tribulational in its content. Three or four speakers would rotate around among the host churches.

I was chosen to be committee chairman at the organizational meeting following the 1969 conference. In 1973 we invited Robert Culver, Walter Martin and a representative of the ABMJ to speak. We knew that Walter Martin\(^{17}\) was not pre-trib in his theology, but we thought his assigned topic (cults in prophecy) would be a safe subject. Wrong! Despite knowing the stance of the conference, he chose to make an issue of his different understanding.

Meanwhile Robert Culver (who had written a classic defense of the pre-trib, pre-mill view some years before\(^{18}\)) revealed that he had recently come to understand that a mid-week rapture better fit the teaching of Scripture.

These two views created a firestorm among the pastors who supported the conference. After several hours of discussion, it was decided that we should develop a doctrinal statement for the Prophetic Conference. As chairman, I felt it was my responsibility to help get the ball rolling. Therefore, I took the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches’ doctrinal statement, removed references to denominational distinctives, changed the title to that of the GWPC, and presented it to the group as a starting point for adaptation or revision. You may imagine my surprise and delight when the group of keenly astute pastors adopted the entire statement, with only two additions – two Scripture verses. That revealed to me how much in the center of conservative evangelical theology the FGBC stands.
The most disappointing thing to me was the resulting resignation of the vice chairman from the committee. He was a most gracious, helpful man, who was also a Free Methodist pastor. He felt he should resign in light of the strong feelings of some of the pastors concerning the matter of tongues. His understanding was not consistent with theirs, and he chose to step off the committee rather than possibly create a disturbance. I felt that I had lost a dear friend and fellow associate in God’s work.

When I became pastor, the congregation faced a matter of great concern. Some years earlier they had purchased five acres of land out beyond the beltway, in Lanham, Maryland. The congregation was divided. Should they move out of the city to the suburbs? Should they stay where they were, anticipating a change in the ethnic makeup of the community around the church? Should they start a branch church? There was sharp disagreement among the people.

Now...what would this new pastor want? And...the annual meeting of the congregation was held just two months after we began serving the church.

At the meeting, I recommended that we devote the next twelve months to prayer, seeking God’s direction for our body. This was enthusiastically accepted. For the next year we prayed and thought, thought and prayed. Of course it made sense to think that God would either send us a buyer or He would simply make it crystal clear that we were to remain at the corner of 12th & E Street. He did neither.

Dick Saunders (one of our faithful deacons) asked me what I planned to do at the next annual meeting. “Why, ask the people to indicate what they believed God would desire us to do.”

“I think,” said he, “it would be very helpful if you bring a recommendation.”

“Okay. I’ll plan on doing that.”

At the meeting I presented five distinct options, as I saw them. Then I recommended one, with reasons for that proposal. The people gave an overwhelming response. There were two “nays” and two “abstentions” from the entire congregation. The
rest were “ayes.” Since an abstention means the voter didn’t cast a vote either way, but would accept the decision made by the rest, I felt the choice was very clear. Dick told me afterward that, if we had taken the vote the previous year, it likely would have been close to a 50/50 vote.

So now, what are we to do? A month later I recommended to the church that we ask God to do something some would consider rather radical. “Let’s ask Him to allow us to sell 12th & E and be relocated in Lanham by October first of this year.”

Was this brash, or rash, or presumptuous? I remembered what God did in the matter of leaving Galion, and asked for his confirmation of this decision also. So we waited, and prayed, and looked.

Then God brought The Holy Temple of Christ, Incorporated to us. This young church badly needed a church home. Their pastor requested use of our building for the funeral of the wife of a pastor in their fellowship. They had nothing of adequate size for the expected crowd. After talking with Rudy Pryor, our head trustee, we assented. I attended the three hour service, which included two choirs, seven speakers, in addition to two bishops (one being the aforementioned pastor). After the funeral service, when I made myself known, I was asked why I didn’t also speak.

The black congregation (for such it was) proposed to purchase the 12th & E building from us, and they requested that we hold their promissory note for $110,000, after they made an initial down payment.

Now you must remember that just the previous summer (1968) Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had led the Poor People’s March on Washington, D.C. A prevailing theme among many black people at that time was: “Black Is Beautiful.” Feelings ran high. The area around 12th & E Street had the second highest crime rate in the city. Some of our church members did not think the black congregation would make good on their pledge, if we granted their wish.
The business meeting to consider the offer took place when I was away in Winona Lake, Indiana for National Conference. As I left, I gave Frank Gardner (our Moderator) a letter recommending that we accept the offer, and sell the building. The people voted to do so.

On October 1, we met for the first time in our new (temporary) church home – the chapel of the recently relocated Washington Bible College – just across the street from our property. Remember our brash, rash, presumptuous prayer request? And therein hangs a story…

In February, 1968, I contacted George Miles, the president of WBC, to see if we could make use of the chapel for our worship services. He asked me to write a letter of request, and they would have it on file when the time came. I later learned that several groups had the same wish.

In August, after making the commitment to sell, I called to confirm that the chapel would indeed be available for our use. Our letter had the earliest post mark, so we were able to move in on October 1. Our home (the parsonage) was used for the children’s department of Sunday School, as well as for our youth group. A room above our garage became a center for some other group. This continued for the 2 ½ years it took to build our new church building.

We not only sold the 12th & E building and relocated, but we also worked through the task of planning and constructing our new church home. One unique aspect of the planning involved the fact that our architect knew nothing about immersion as a form of baptism. So the idea of a “baptistery” in which people were “dunked” was foreign to him. His first design showed something like a bathtub mounted on wheels that ran on a set of tracks. These led from a closet behind the platform onto the platform. When someone was to be baptized, the family could stand around the “bathtub” to observe the baptism. After we had explained more clearly what we wanted, he did well, although the baptistery was roughly four times the size it needed to be.
Meanwhile on the home front two particular events stand out in my mind. The first involves Daniel. On one occasion he asked about attending a movie with some friends. I recall sharing with him some Bible principles about respecting other people who disagree in gray matters or right and wrong (Scripture is very “black and white” about some things and open about others). I then told him he was free to choose what he would do. I would stand up for his right to do so.

The second item of memory involved David. I thought he was beginning to show disrespect to Janice. This was totally inappropriate…first, as a child to his parent…next, as a professing Christian…and finally, as the son of an elder, part of whose qualification for that office was that he have his family in order.

So, on a school day, I asked Janice to make us both a sack lunch. I also kept David home from school. We then drove up to the Catoctin Mountains, in the general vicinity of Camp David. There we took a long walk through the woods, enjoyed our lunch, and talked about my concern. I believe I violated one of my personal desires – to never make their being a “preacher’s kid” a basis for pressuring my children into some sort of action. As I recall, I eventually told him that I believed a continuation of the attitude I was addressing would result in my resigning from the ministry. It would not matter what the church or the deacons thought…it was what I believed was right.

We returned home, and I have never since that day had reason to think he showed disrespect to Janice…or me either. God has blessed us with children who have demonstrated great attitudes toward me through the various moves we have made through the years. Some of those moves took them away from close friends and active youth groups. I have concluded that they had a sense that their father was making decisions in accordance with God’s will, as he understood it.

District youth rallies, district camp (in cooperation with the Southeast District, at Camp Tuk-A-Way), and checking out Frederick, Maryland, as a prospective site for a new GBC plant,
were all a part of the business of serving God in the Lanham church.

There were several things I recall as being a bit on the humorous side. First, after relocating to 5200 Good Luck Road (our church address), I facetiously suggested that we could a) use a four leaf clover on our church letterhead, b) hang a horseshoe over the front door, c) give out rabbit’s feet to visitors, and d) change our church name to “The Good Luck Grace Brethren Church.” That was not well received by some of our people, who were not given to seeing humor in various situations.

Second, as a result of ripping my pants while playing volleyball, I came home from a winter Youth Rally wearing plaid Bermuda shorts, white knee socks, a white shirt and tie, and a plaid sports jacket (that clashed wonderfully with the shorts). It was c-c-c-old!

Another humorous memory surprisingly has to do with an offering prayer. Our district conference ran over through Sunday morning, one year. Due to my involvement with the conference as well as activities with the youth that same weekend, I was (as my friend Caleb would say) “whupped.” At the evening service, Roy Hoover led some songs. Then I made a few announcements, after which we received the offering. When I began to pray, my mind went on automatic pilot. “Dear Lord,” I prayed. “We thank You for this food…” I stopped. Did I really say: “…our food”? Yes, Chuck, you did. After an embarrassing pause, I completed my prayer, and the offering was taken.

Not a soul stirred. Well, one little boy behind Janice said: “Momma, did he say ‘food’?”

Roy led another song, and I stood to speak. This was just too good to ignore. So, I said something like: “Now wasn’t that funny?” Then the church exploded with laughter. Our people enjoyed funny things. They didn’t want to laugh ‘at’ someone. But they appreciated laughing ‘with’ someone.

Another special memory pertains to Dick and Zelda Saunders. These special people basically ‘adopted’ our children, and treated them as their own grandchildren. On some nights
when we were sitting at home, eating popcorn and enjoying being together, we would hear the kitchen door open and close. Then, after a bit of a pause, they would come into the family room to visit a while. After they went home, our children would rush to the refrigerator to see what they had left there. Ice cream bars, tootsie pops, or some such were excitedly discovered…and eaten.

In 1970 the Saunders moved into our home so Janice could attend National Conference in California with me. Only later did it dawn on us the extent of their sacrifice. They had air conditioning in their home. We didn’t. They were accustomed to their pattern of living, not ours. But they fit in. When our children said that we had “Prayers” after breakfast each morning, they saw to it that Prayers were held – Thornton style.

When Janice and I returned home, there was a large “Welcome Home” banner hung across the front porch. Dick and Zelda had helped make that special reception …special. He spent “Grandpa” time with David – helping him learn some of the finer points of driving a car.

From 1968-1970, and again in 1972, I had the privilege of serving as National Bible Quizmaster. It was in 1970 that I faced a most difficult test in that responsibility. Because of the unwillingness of one quizzer to accept my decisions (as well as my failure to be more decisive), the resulting debate had to be taken to the National Youth Committee for adjudication. The result: his team was eliminated from the competition, and I was not asked to be Quiz Master the next year. Through the vision and ministry of my friend, Pastor Jim Custer, however, that young man was reclaimed for Christ and an effective ministry as a Minister of Music.

During our time in the D.C. area, I had opportunities to aid people getting their visas for overseas travel. One time we hosted a fellow who was visiting from Germany. My sister Martha and her husband Don Miller, who were serving under the Navigators in Germany, gave him our name and address. When he arrived in the Capitol, he stayed with us. It was interesting to have him join us in our family altar time. When we read
Scripture, I loaned him my German Bible so he could read in his language. The rest of us read in English. As usual I enjoyed using my bit of vocabulary with him.

We had excellent relations with Washington Bible College. A number of its students attended our church for worship, and some shared actively in our ministry. I taught the college age class for a time. One Sunday only one student showed up. He worked all week in New York City. Each weekend he came home directly from work to devote as much time to his girl friend as possible. That invariably included Saturday night…late. This particular morning he fell asleep in class. When I saw his situation, I thought: “Should I wake him? Or, should I ignore him and keep on talking?” (Now, that’s pretty dumb – to talk to a sleeping student, isn’t it?) So-o-o, I just sat quietly until the class time was over, then went about my other business. He needed the sleep more than my lesson just then.

While we were in Lanham I began a seven year stint as a member of the Board of CE National (its current name). It was always a special treat to be able to “put my oar in the water” in some ministry outside our local church. In a sense, it enlarged the ministry of our church, since the people paid my salary and granted me the time away for such work.

Another aspect of National Conference in which I was involved was service on the Credentials Committee. I served approximately 20 years in some capacity in that committee.

For a few years I had the pleasure of driving the Temple Hills GBC bus to Camp Tuk-A-Way, down near Blacksburg, Virginia. There I served as life guard, at times. I eventually began to serve as director.

There are two special memories of those years. The first I recall involved the year I had the privilege of being Bible teacher. I wanted to make the classes interesting. In order to accomplish this daunting task, I decided I would teach my lessons using storytelling as my vehicle. To add ‘flavor,’ I took the variously colored rings of a “Ring Toss” game, and placed a different colored ring on my head for each different individual in the Bible
story. I told two stories each class time. The first was a simple “What story is this?” for the class to guess. The second was the basis for my lesson of the day.

Some years later I was pleasantly surprised when a Youth Pastor said to me that he began thinking about serving God as a result of realizing that Christians can have fun doing serious ‘stuff.’

The second special memory concerns a time I was camp director. It was youth week. The campers were undisciplined and rowdy, especially at the evening campfire services. They were disrespectful to the speaker of the week. The third day, I believe God pointed out to me the problem. Satan was definitely “on the loose” in camp. That evening I asked the speaker to let me speak. I proceeded to speak on “Satan’s Fingerprints,” indicating various ways in which the enemy of our souls sought to destroy or disrupt God’s work in our lives. I had asked some staff members to be especially in prayer for that time. God worked, and a fresh spirit of cooperation and openness came on the students in camp.

The family names Munch, Pryor, Merrick, Hoover, Lohr, Baltimore, Lyle, Gardner and Martin are only a few of those that bring memories to life, whenever we think of them.

One such memory is of the time the three Gardner children gave their father, Frank (our church moderator) a deep sea fishing trip as a birthday present. The boat they hired held six customers. I was invited to fill the sixth seat. Happily I accepted the invitation. After a week at Camp Tuk-A-Way, followed by driving the bus home on Saturday, and delivering tired kids to their homes until about 1:00 A.M., I preached the next morning. The day was pretty full. We left immediately after the evening service to drive all night to North Carolina to go fishing.

Captain Sonny Briggs made certain that we got our fish. In fact we caught 330 pounds of fish that day. I was sick…not sea sick, but sick from fatigue and insufficient sleep. But it was such a great experience, with some great friends.

Then, back home to work again.
MILEPOST #10

Lansing, Michigan
Chapter 25

Redirection #3

During the 1973-74 and 1974-75 school years I drove a school bus. This had become necessary as our growing family of eight, plus Dave Peters (a son of missionaries to Africa, who lived with us one of those years) required more finances than the church was able to provide. The church board reluctantly agreed to my bus driving, since it was a job that allowed me freedom during the middle of the day.

I soon learned that God often brings special benefits from situations that appear to be negative. Each morning, my first bus run began at 6:30. The second began at 7:30, and the third at 8:30. I had no route scheduled at 7:30, so after a few days of sitting at the local 7/11 Store and drinking coffee, I used the time to do my daily Bible reading. Since regular Bible reading is something I have struggled with throughout my Christian life, it became a blessing in disguise.

The time constraints, however, definitely detracted from focusing on the church and its needs. So, I began considering what God would place before me next. About midway through the second year, I concluded that we should be moving. So, in January I resigned – again not knowing where we would be going. I did, however, request permission to remain at Lanham through the end of the school year, since David was to graduate from high school.

Three opportunities arose: 1) the GBC of Lansing, Michigan, 2) the church at Ankenytown, Ohio, and 3) an associate pastor’s position in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. After driving to Lansing, speaking to the church, and meeting with the board, option one was resolved – not sufficient salary. We then went to Ankenytown to explore option two, to discover that the parsonage was too small. (Besides, the church decided not to call us.) Therefore, thumbs down. When I spoke at Lancaster, things appeared to go well. We returned home with a good sense of optimism. Vernon Harris, the Sr. Pastor, called to inform me that
my candidating had served to make the people aware of some unresolved issues that stemmed from the previous associate’s tenure. He was very apologetic, but I figured one reason God had me candidate was possibly to initiate some important “discovery and recovery” steps for the church. That was all right. God would reveal the next step in His own time.

Then a leading layman called from the Lansing church. If our financial indebtedness were to be erased, would I reconsider coming to Lansing? After careful consideration, I agreed. (I must make it clear that Janice and I always discussed these matters, and at this time, our older children were aware of the implications of change for them as well.)

The week following David’s graduation, we loaded a U-Haul truck and trailer, which I drove. David followed, driving our VW Minibus – staring at the back of the trailer the entire 400+ miles to Michigan.

One tough part of this move was the fact that three weeks after we arrived in our new home in Grand Ledge, I drove back to Lanham to take #1 Son back. He was the first to ‘leave the nest.’ He had a job and a girl friend back in Maryland, and I leave it with you to decide which one provided the greater call.
Chapter 26

Lansing GBC

The church was twenty years old at this time. It had begun as a Home Missions church. At three different times in its first ten years of history, the Sunday worship attendance had averaged 100 or above, each time under a different pastor. During the ten years prior to our coming, the attendance had steadily dropped. When we arrived there were 36 people in church. Because of these things, the church had come under the care of Home Missions again.

So we began. We had a youth group of about ten. There were only six churches in the Michigan District, but we had our own camp – for junior and youth ages. We had youth rallies, and sent a Quiz Team to National Youth Conference each year. One year I took our VW Minibus (with some 98,000 miles on the odometer) to Youth Conference in Estes Park, Colorado. Eight of us rode in the vehicle, and we towed a 4’ X 8’ utility trailer loaded with our luggage. Did we have trouble? Yes! Wel-l-l, … yes, if you call adding a quart of oil each way trouble. (Isn’t God good?)

One summer, in order to alleviate some of the teacher shortage we had, Janice and I taught the first through sixth grades combined. We had a lark, using Child Evangelism Fellowship materials and mentoring some of our youth in the process. This gave me some practical experience that came in handy in later years at church camp as well as children’s church.

Our first home was located in Grand Ledge, Michigan. It was owned by Mr. Eschtruth. It was a delightful home, with separate bedrooms for each of our children. We lived there for two years, before buying a house on Scott Street, our first-ever ‘owned’ home.

Well, actually we owned a house for all of three days before that time. As we looked around, I saw potential in a house located near the church, a three bedroom ranch house. The basement could be divided into some additional bedrooms, which
would make it most suitable for our family. I signed the papers. I thought they constituted a commitment to serious consideration, but quickly learned that they meant I was committed to a monthly mortgage bill that was beyond our ability to pay.

Now, what was I to do? Then I recalled the following words in Proverbs 6:

If thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger,
Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth,
thou art taken with the words of thy mouth.
Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself;
when thou art come into the hand of thy friend;
go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend.
Give not sleep to thine eyes, nor slumber to thine eyelids.
Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the hunter,
and as a bird from the hand of the fowler.

So, I went as soon as I could to talk with the seller. I explained to him that, as a Christian, I was to follow the directives of Scripture in my life. I had “bitten off more than I could chew” in purchasing his house and I desired, if possible, to get out of the contract. There were two additional matters I spoke of: 1) I had signed a contract, and I would do what was necessary to fulfill it if he so desired and 2) I recognized that my deposit would be forfeit, if he saw fit to graciously relieve me of the contract.

He was very understanding. He told me that he had already had to take back his house after the buyer failed to keep up the payments. It was sold on a land contract basis. And he did not wish to have that take place again. So, as a result, I was no longer the owner of a house, had a greatly relieved mind, and had spent my $100 down payment as tuition for some excellent postgraduate education.

A short time later we found a house on Scott Street in Grand Ledge, which had been sitting empty for almost a year. We were able to purchase it for $3,000 less than the asking price. One year later, when we moved to Sunnyside, Washington, we sold it for the original asking price…in two days!
During the time we lived in Michigan I completed my seven year stint serving on the Board of the old National Sunday School Board, which had become consolidated with the National Youth Committee to become CE National.

There are three other memories from those days. First was the marriage of #1 Son, David, to Karen Spitzer back in Lanham, Maryland. Our family drove back to enjoy the festivities.

The second was holding our District Youth Camp on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, rather than at our usual campgrounds. This was really special – it was a week spent actually camping in tents. When we went to the UP to check out the camp site, the week after Easter, we found over a foot of snow on the softball field. (It was gone by June, when we held camp there.)

The third memory was of a trip in which I was unable to participate. A District Youth Rally was scheduled for the UP (at Moran, MI) and Ray Myers was to drive our “Old Faithful” VW Bus up with some of our youth aboard. They set out. They proceeded up the highway, some 40 miles. Then the “miracle bus” just gave out. It broke down just about under a highway overpass. (It appears that the 123,000 miles on the odometer was just a ‘tad bit’ too much for the tired engine.) So, the busload of youth had several hours to wait until other means of transportation could be provided. They went up on the bridge and waved happily at the passing cars, invited truckers to blow their air horns, and enjoyed themselves immensely. Finally, cars arrived and they continued on their way.

Upon arrival at the lodge where the rally was to be held, they discovered that gloom had set in…in all its gloominess. It was raining. The planned outdoor activities could not be held and no backup plans had been made. The adults were gathered in one place, while across the room sat the youth in all their misery. Our kids had been accustomed to planning and directing their own parties. This was a bit abrupt, but they resolved to have a good time. So they chose sides, selected games and other activities. The result was one of the best rallies in their memories.
The demise of the VW bus was also the demise of the Thornton family’s means of transportation. God graciously provided the means for purchasing a 1978 Chevrolet Beauville two-tone green van. What a delight! We received it shortly before Christmas of 1977.

Almost the first use of the van was my trip to visit someone in the Lansing hospital. As I came from the hospital, I stopped at a four-way stop. When I started forward to make a left turn, the van stopped dead. Nothing would help. I was stopped cold. So, I called a tow truck. He picked me up and towed me home. Upon arrival, Janice and the children were astounded. This was during the days before cell phones (at least for me), and I had not called to give them the news.

We were able to have the van repaired. It provided real heat for the cold Michigan winter (we used to scrape the inside of the VW bus windows).

It was also at the Lansing GBC that I pulled one of my infamous “remember who I am?” boners. One Sunday night we had visitors. So I welcomed them. The first was a couple I had met before, at the Calvary Brethren Church in Alto, Michigan. I was so pleased to see them that I welcomed “Duane” and Margie Thompson. (Actually his name was Darwin.) I then turned to the young woman whom I had not yet met. “Will you kindly introduce yourself?” I asked. She stood to her feet, and graciously said: “I’m your sister, Cathy.”

Gulp!

After the service “Duane” came to me and said: “I really enjoyed the service, Pastor ‘Carl.’” We shared a good chuckle.

Cathy has forgiven me. I have recovered from the embarrassment. And life goes on. Although Cathy does enjoy reminding me, on occasion, that this trait of forgetting my siblings did not begin with her. I failed to recognize my brother, John, when I returned to Greenfield, Illinois on one occasion. I did, however, recognize his wife, Marcia (whose name I could not recall, either), so I think I did pretty well.
MILEPOST #11

Sunnyside, Washington
Chapter 27

Redirection #4

After we moved to Lansing, our financial picture again changed. In two years we were once more in a state of struggle for financial stability. At one point in time, I sensed the pressure so deeply that I wrote the following bit of verse:

I talked it out with God today.
My words were blunt, I said my say:
“You’ve promised all my need to meet,
Clothes for my back, shoes for my feet,
Roof overhead, food for to eat.

“I preach to help your people, Lord.
I tell them, ‘Trust God’s Holy Word.
He’s never failed His people loved,
His mighty power has mountains moved.
His peace the hearts of them shall keep.
Who, trusting in the Lord, shall sleep.’

“But God, my soul is in turmoil.
My peace, my joy begun to spoil.
Some bills are due, my pocket’s bare.
The children need new shoes to wear.
The glow of joy has left my life.
My mind’s confused, it’s filled with strife.”

Have I failed God? Has He failed me?
My mind and Bible don’t agree.
“Lord, don’t let me preach a lie
I must believe each word I say.
How can I now, with thirsty heart,
To thirsty souls true drink impart?
O prove yourself to me again,
I would be honest before men.”
During our final year in Michigan, I got work as a substitute school bus driver. As such, I drove an average of four days a week. This was a great help to the Thornton family economy. I believe this fits the category of ‘living by faith,’ since I was looking to God to “supply all my need.” If my faith had been in my church (no matter what its location), I would have been disappointed in every one of them. Since, however, I sought to trust God for my supply, I could serve a church that had insufficient resources, or vision. Like Elijah, I believed that God had, possibly not a widow, but some means of support. God didn’t see fit to send ravens, but he did ‘send’ a school bus. That provision allowed me to have the middle portion of the week days free for pastoral duties.

Then, in His unique timing, God saw fit to move us again to a place where the financial provision began to be more adequate as regarded our family’s needs. There is another wonderful truth of God’s Word, which I am reminded of: “I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content.”

I communicated with Dr. Lester Pifer, the director of the Brethren Home Missions Council, regarding my plans to move on my sense of the need for a full time pastor at Lansing. How the next steps came about, I do not know. I was, however, contacted by the Sunnyside, Washington GBC and asked to consider being their next pastor.

On a cold, windy day in March, Janice and I drove to the airport in Grand Rapids, Michigan to fly to Washington. We arrived in Yakima at about 8:00 pm, were met and driven to the home of Merrill and Dorothy Darr, our hosts for the weekend. They greeted us warmly, and we visited until midnight. Then off to bed. In the morning, I awoke at my usual time, 6:00 am, only to discover that we were three time zones away from home. It was 3:00 a.m. Three a.m.! But I was now awake…and the next day had arrived, more quickly than I had expected (much more).

This was Saturday, and we were shown around town. Then we were taken to the district camp grounds at Clear Lake, where snow was still on the ground. The temperature, however,
was delightfully warm. We left home wearing winter coats and stopped once on the way to the airport to scrape the windshield for visibility. Here we needed only a jacket for comfort.

Sunday came. I met with three combined adult classes at the Sunday School hour. During the class, one man gave his name as “George Peabody,” when I requested it. I learned later that this was an old family joke. His name was Tom Horney. You can imagine my surprise when, after moving to Sunnyside, I met the real George Peabody!

I preached in the morning worship service. We enjoyed a great carry-in dinner. Afterward there was an open meeting for questions. Among those asked was: Q1 - Do you engage in much counseling? A – My primary counseling is done from the pulpit, and at the door of the church. There has been comparatively little formal counseling in my ministry. Q2 – (in light of a sheet with facts concerning my ministry to date) Three years seems like a very short tenure in the last church, doesn’t it? A – Yes it does. I have consistently planned for long pastorates, but God has seen fit to move me to needy churches. Q3 – What is Janice’s spiritual gift…does she teach women? A – I am happy that she seeks to serve in the church in the same way that the wives of other men do. That is, by seeking to serve consistent with her interests and abilities, and not in conflict with her priorities…being a wife and mother. It was a profitable time.

After the evening service, Fred flew Janice and me to Seattle in his private plane. It was a treat to see the mountains with snow down to about the 9,000 foot level. We flew alongside Mt. Rainier, in all her glory. After that we flew home to await the verdict of the Sunnyside congregation.

While packing, we discovered that we had too much ‘stuff.’ Dorothy Darr promptly loaned us a leather case. “But how will we get it back to you?” “Just bring it with you when you move,” was her reply. “You will be coming back, you know.”

We did.
Chapter 28

Sunnyside GBC

After the moving van was loaded, we spent our last night in Michigan at the home of the Rockafellows. They served tacos for supper. The next day we started for Washington State.

When we moved to Michigan I had ‘horsed’ things like washers, dryers, refrigerators and kitchen ranges onto the trailer. When we moved from the Eschtruth house to Scott Street, I did the same. But at a later date, when I stooped to pick up a lawn mower shield weighing fifteen pounds, my back ‘went out.’ This initiated a nine month long series of visits to a chiropractor for the express purpose of restoring my back to good shape again. About six weeks into the process, we moved to Sunnyside (2,000 miles away). By the chiropractor’s orders, I was to lie down any time I was not driving. So our new Chevy van was a real boon.

I drove the van and Jonathan followed in his Pontiac Le Mans. His beagle, Angie, rode shotgun. The three girls rotated between the cars. Janice and I enjoyed watching Angie’s long ears flapping in the breeze as she leaned out the car window.

At one stop, Jon bought me a picture on a plastic place mat: “Carson’s men.” I kept it for about fourteen years before getting it framed. Today that picture graces the wall of my study…a good reminder of that trip. But more importantly, a reminder of a son who wanted to give his father something special. On that trip we also were introduced to “Texas Rolls,” huge cinnamon rolls that we got for breakfast.

We made our first of a number of stops at Wall Drugs, a famous stop in South Dakota. Later we passed Coeur D’Alene, Idaho, went through Spokane, Washington, and entered the dry land wheat farming area of Washington State. This terrain was so unlike the Washington which our family had seen on television shows that our children seemed about to mutiny, and return to Michigan. But, after living a while in the Yakima Valley, we came to enjoy the area. This was the best climate in which we
had lived. There was less humidity. There was more dust, at times, although dust storms lessened as irrigation increased.

John Terrell, the former pastor, had been quite musical. This prompted a desire to continue the strong musical dimension he had initiated. We called Mike Wagner to come on staff as Minister of Music. He also gave leadership to the youth program. Under his direction, we had some great special musical events that included Christmas, Easter and the Fourth of July. Regretfully we discovered that, although he and I used the same vocabulary, we did not understand the definitions alike. In time the misunderstanding led to Mike’s departure from the church. He entered another church where his abilities were used even better than at SSGBC. I prefer to think the separation was more like that of Barnabas and Saul than that at the tower of Babel.

Mike was also highly involved in developing the Lower Valley Bible Institute, which our church established. This was a brief, but significant, endeavor to provide quality Bible Institute level instruction for people in the surrounding area.

I attended the annual District Pastors’ Retreat at Camp Clear Lake each year we lived in Washington. In 1980, Rebekah drove Janice up to the retreat to inform me of my brother John’s death. I promptly left the camp, went home with them and then flew to Illinois for John’s funeral. My other brother, Sam, met me at Lambert Field in St. Louis and flew me down to Carterville, Illinois, in his small plane. How special it is to realize that the songwriter had it right: “If we could see beyond today as God can see. If all the clouds should roll away, the shadows flee…” Afterwards I flew back home, little realizing that about a year later our own daughter, Mary, would be in God’s presence.

“Go…preach the gospel…” is the command. In seeking to fulfill it, I was part of the team sent to explore Montana for a suitable site to plant a new church. We chose Helena as the site. Although the endeavor “failed” after two years, I believe it is better to try and fail at a good thing, than succeed at nothing.
Chapter 29

“It Is Appointed ...”

“Its life some rain must fall” is an old saw. The perspective of a Christian on the “rains” will dramatically affect his response to them. Even in the earth-shattering thunderstorms, with their devastating destruction, God remains good.

If our God allowed His only begotten Son, Jesus, to walk through three hours of total blackness, for my sake (and that of the entire world, as well), why should I think it so terrible if He should see fit to allow some darkness to enter my life, or that of my family?

Such a storm struck our home on December 11, 1981. How such a simple thing as a day off from high school for the happy purpose of going snow skiing could suddenly become a time of emotional darkness, seems almost incomprehensible. The human tragedy and personal sorrow of that day, and subsequent ones, has only been lessened by the sweet, inner assurance that God “knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust.”

Mary was to bring a friend home for breakfast at 7:00 A.M., before they drove up to White Pass for a day of skiing. The hour passed and she had not come. About 7:25, we answered a knock on the door to admit the Captain of the local Emergency Medical Team. He kindly informed us that Mary had been killed instantly as a result of a single car accident on the highway. She, possibly thinking it was an animal, had swerved the car to keep from hitting a scrap of vinyl material blowing across the road. (Our Mary loved animals and would do just about anything to prevent bringing pain to them.) In recovering from the swerve, she evidently hit some loose gravel, and subsequently, our small Dodge Omni both flipped and rolled, throwing Mary out.

The shock of learning of the car accident, the growing awareness that our Mary was to be no longer with us (on earth), the succeeding days of picking up family members at the airport, the funeral service itself...all these form a mosaic of actions and
emotions in our minds, which the years have served to soften but not eradicate.

The teaching that “the spiritual people will/should/must always rejoice at the death of another believer” is a fiction straight from the pit. Long before that time, I had settled in my mind the fact that, since Jesus wept at Lazarus’ grave, it was fitting and appropriate for men to weep at the loss of a loved one or friend, even a fellow believer. It is so easy to put on a face of seeming imperviousness to the pain and sorrow of such an event, but to do such would be to deny the very humanity with which God created us. In fact, as a result of those days and their depth of human loss, God graciously taught me some precious lessons about Himself and myself, too.

Many people ministered to us at that time. Two of them come especially to mind. Dave Marksbury was pastor near Seattle, Washington. He drove three hours, one way, to attend the funeral service. Then he promptly left to drive back home…as an expression of love for me and my family.

On the day of Mary’s “accident,” John McIntosh, came to our home, walked in, simply placed his arms around Janice and me, and wept. His quiet actions spoke more loudly than words just then. How often that display of caring has served to encourage me as I have sat in hospital waiting rooms with others.

In my own case, my endeavors to become like my boyhood heroes (those fictional greats of Western writers, the strong, silent frontiersmen and others) had led me to the place where I simply didn’t cry, even at Mary’s death and funeral.

Six months later, however, God graciously did a most wonderful thing for me. I was driving our church bus from Sunnyside to Camp Clear Lake, about eighty miles up in the Cascade Mountains, to bring home a group of young people from a retreat. As I drove along, I began to sing a couple of songs about the love of God, “His Glorious Love,” and “O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go.” Suddenly, these thoughts came to me: Although I deeply loved my daughter, Mary, my love was limited and finite, while God’s love for His son was infinite in both time
and degree; this thing (an automobile accident) was, for Mary, both unforeseen and unanticipated, while God had foreknown, and had even planned the death of His beloved Son; I would have done anything humanly possible to prevent Mary’s death, but God had consciously determined to, not only allow, but also to bring about, the crucifixion of His Son on the Cross, and it was for me, for my sake, for my salvation!

Suddenly something of the depths of God’s love for this sinner touched my mind and heart! Compared with my love for Mary, God’s love shone like the brightest sunshine of midday compared to the deepest gloom of midnight.

I began to sing at the top of my lungs, “O perfect love of Christ, my Lord Divine, that made Him stoop to save a soul like mine. Through all my days, and then in heav’n above, my soul will silence never, I’ll worship Him forever, and praise Him for His matchless love.” As I did, tears began to flow from my eyes. Tears, I believe, for two reasons; because the emotional dam that had held for six months, ever since Mary’s death, had at last broken; and my perception of the incredible love of God for me welled up and overflowed.

Can you imagine seeing this man, all alone in a church bus, singing like a mad man, with tears rolling down his face, and no one else around?

Yes, God taught me to cry.

I still tend to be more unemotional than many others, but today, I am much more able to “weep with them that weep” than I ever was before.
MILEPOST #12

Dallas Center, Iowa
Chapter 30

Redirection #5

“Pastor, will you come to my office and meet with some of the men of the church?”
“Certainly. What is a good time?”
“How about, say, 11:00 am?”

I arrived at the office, to discover eleven men there, sitting in a circle. After being seated, I was informed that the men were concerned that there had been little growth in the attendance at church during my five year ministry. I readily agreed that I could wish it were greater. Then it came (shortened for the sake of brevity). I was asked if I “would consider resigning for the good of the church. And… it seems wise if nothing about this meeting were shared with the rest of the church. There could be a lack of unity as a result.”

I left the meeting deeply troubled. What should I do? To the best of my understanding, the congregation was pleased with my ministry. I felt certain that a “vote of confidence” would be positive. But, on the other hand, of the eleven men, nine were currently elected leaders in the church (the other two had been recently). That included the moderator, all the chairmen of the standing committees, plus several deacons.

Although I had no desire to leave the church, the fact that so many key leaders felt as they did was very telling. I called my father for his counsel. He suggested that if the congregationally elected leadership were not supportive, I should leave.

The following Sunday I resigned, which brings me to one of the most distressing events of my life. I was asked by some of the people if I had been asked to resign. My answer was a consistent “No.” And, in the actual words used, that was a true answer. It actually skirted the fact that I would not have resigned had not this group of men indicated (whether by spoken word or by silent assent) that they felt I should.

I was “underwhelmed.” My family was unhappy. Some of the church people indicated that they, too, were unhappy. But the
die was cast. Still, the words of Scripture are encouraging: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.”

22 God is still on the throne.

Now, where were we to go next?

In time, I was contacted by the Dallas Center, Iowa GBC. They were seeking a pastor. Would I consider the position? This appeared to be yet another instance of God’s provision at the right time. Janice and I drove to Dallas Center the weekend prior to National Conference. There I preached, and we met with the Board. Then we went on to Winona Lake. We stopped back by overnight, on the way back home.

The people agreed to call me as their next pastor, so Janice and I (our family was now down to us two) made plans to relocate, yet again. Dallas Center, Iowa, here we come.

So we moved again...to the sixth church in my ministry.
Dallas Center GBC

Jesus told His disciples: “Come apart and rest awhile.”

The move we now made, to the next place of service, was to be such a situation for us. Does that mean that we did nothing? No. Was it simply “R&R”? No. (After all, during their “R&R” with Jesus, the disciples helped serve over 5,000 people.) The normal responsibilities of a pastor continued. But it was indeed a time of restoration from a period of special stress. God had uniquely brought the Dallas Center GBC and us together for a time of mutual benefit.

The Sunday I candidated provides an apt demonstration of the need I had for such a break. Janice and I had arrived in town on Saturday. We were met and taken to the home of our hosts, Roger Herr and his good wife. There we enjoyed relaxing after the drive from Washington State. When we arrived at church the next morning, I discovered that I had left my Bible at the Herr’s home…with my sermon notes inside. I quickly drove out to get the Bible, and we proceeded with the day.

After the details of the call were settled, we completed our ministry at Sunnyside and moved to Iowa. In the back seat rode two pets: a cat and (in a cage) a parakeet. Upon arrival at Dallas Center, the cat promptly vanished. After the moving van was unloaded, and we were settling in, the cat returned with its contribution to our larder – a baby rabbit.

I have taught in Sunday School in every church I’ve served. Dallas Center was no exception. God led me to use as my first study, a book that detailed some key qualities of an effective church: Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness. The contents of this book proved to be exactly what some of our people had been looking for – a presentation of a biblical picture of the character of an ‘alive’ church.

We soon sensed a renewed spirit of joy and optimism in the church. This replaced a feeling of despair that had gripped the people prior to our coming. “But God…” (There it is again!)
Snippets
I sent the book to Jonathan our son, who promptly taught it to all three adult classes of the new Peninsula Grace church.

For four years we had the privilege of loving, and being loved by, the people of that special church.

As we settled into the church and community, I met the other pastors. Soon I was confronted with the question of inter-church relationships. Should our church cooperate with other churches? If so, to what extent? At what point are we Christians to separate ourselves from others who name the name of Christ, because they hold to different understanding of biblical doctrine? Are there some ways in which the greater Body of Christ may legitimately work together?

In Dallas Center, I concluded that there were two areas in which we could cooperate with all the churches in town – Thanksgiving and Easter. Thanksgiving is a National holiday. One in which we Christians may unite in giving thanks to God for the freedoms and other blessings He has granted our nation. I was asked to speak at the service at the Presbyterian Church. While speaking of God’s “mighty works,”25 I included the “mightiest” work of salvation through the completed work of Christ on the Cross, for which we are called to give praise.

The next Palm Sunday night, our church hosted the first of several annual praise services. At these we focused on musical expressions of praise to God. Choirs, specials, and congregational singing were the primary focus of our evening.

During that same four years, Janice and I had the joy of watching as Bob, our neighbor, who was pastor of the Methodist church, became a Christian. His ministry was dramatically changed. He began to share the Gospel with his people. Eventually, he was moved from that church to another one.

For those same four years I had the privilege of working with the Iowa Sunday School Association (ISSA). This was a special group of people from different denominations with a keen interest in improving the ministry of churches by holding training conventions.
I must relate one particular experience God had for me. Both the president and dean of the Open Bible College in Des Moines, Iowa were members of the board of ISSA. I was invited to speak at one of their chapel services.

“Is there any topic you have in mind?”
“No. Just speak on whatever God lays on your heart.”

So I prayed and thought. Then I was impressed by Matthew 6:1-18. So I prepared.

The big day finally arrived. As chapel began, the student chaplain led in a song and prayer time. As the students began praying, a number prayed aloud at the same time – a cacophony of sound, to my ears. Then, in addition, I heard some begin praying in tongues. This, to my ears, added the word “chaotic” to my description of the prayer time.

I thought: “Oh, oh! What have I gotten myself into? Have I made a big mistake in my planning and preparation?”

Then, a thought came: “Never doubt in the dark what you thought was right in the light.” This was followed by the thought that if (since) I believed God directed me in my choice of messages, He wanted the students to hear it. So-o-o, I spoke:

1. Don’t do alms, praying, or fasting for men’s applause.
2. Don’t pray with meaningless repetition.
3. Don’t look for rewards from men.

I left the chapel wondering what the students and faculty thought of my message. About six weeks later the Dean spoke with me. He said that the students usually forget chapel messages in about three days. However, they were still talking about the Matthew 6 passage and its implications for them.

Why would this be so? I had been concerned that the students and/or faculty might feel that I was speaking against their method of praying or, perhaps, their exercising of tongues. I then considered that my emphasis on “Thus saith the Lord” (chapter and verse) brought the students into confrontation with the Scriptures and their call to genuineness in the conduct of religious exercises.
The 1985 church Christmas program was enhanced by the presence of our 2 week old grandson, David Thornton, who ‘played’ baby Jesus, plastic pacifier and all.

One year, for our District Conference, the pastors chose to select four of our number to speak, rather than bring in an outside speaker. Our theme was “Building a Godly Home.” In light of the recent (1981) death of our daughter, Mary, I was asked to speak on the subject: “Building a Godly Home through Tragedy.” I was reminded again of some ways in which God graciously leads his children through the “valley of the shadow of death” as part of his work both in them and in his greater work (see chapter 29).

In June 1986, I was serving as purchasing agent for our district camp when I received word that my mother had died. So I left camp, picked up Janice and drove back to Illinois for her funeral. Dad had mentioned that I might wish to say a few words, but I didn’t realize that I would be leading the funeral service. All the next morning my sisters, brother and I discussed various songs to sing, as well as ideas regarding the conduct of the service itself. Finally Elsie suggested that “maybe Charlie could put the program together – after all he is a preacher.”

During the service we sang seven congregational songs. Ruth played the organ. Janice presided at the piano. Elsie sang a solo, and the entire Thornton family sang yet another song.

Once I had occasion to listen to the recording of that memorial service. Only then did I realize how much tension I had been under. A pastor friend expressed to me his joy that our family could share the blessing of knowing God at that time. He was delighted to see how sharing Christ as our family did could make such a difference in what is normally a solemn service.

Glenn Perkins, one of the finest head ushers I have known, is in the Dallas Center church. Perkins, Wengers, Herrs, Rittgers and other names remind me of special fellowship and love shared during the four years we lived and served God in Iowa.

During those years, two specific family events come to mind. The first pertains to the Christmas that all three sons came
to visit. “Hi, Grandma. I have chickenpox,” were among the first words spoken by Bradley (#1 grandson), as he came into the house. What a delightful reunion!Oops! Well, I guess that’s life.

One evening the sons went bowling, leaving Bradley with Grandma and me. We immediately observed that he was troubled by his father’s absence. To reassure him, as well as keep him busy, we went to my workshop. There we made some items from wood that I had available. When our sons returned, Bradley proudly showed his daddy what he and Grandpa had made.

Another fond memory has to do with the 30th Anniversary of our marriage. Rebekah and Rodney drove to Iowa from Sunnyside, Washington to serve as host and hostess for the open house, which was held in the parsonage. Marilyn Perkins and others of our church ladies worked like Trojans to prepare, decorate and serve the delicious refreshments. Our church people and neighbors came by to share in the joy of this occasion. I was thrilled because Janice was receiving some of the honor due her for her faithfulness through the years to a marriage that she little thought would have her hop-scotching all over the United States as a pastor’s wife.

Truly, “Her children rise up and call her blessed.”27 (“Her husband also…”)
MILEPOST #13

Millersburg, Ohio
Chapter 32

Redirection #6

“Hello, Chuck. This is Ed Jackson. I have what I believe is a great opportunity for you. You see, George Johnson [a missionary to Brazil under Grace Brethren International Missions] is on furlough and has started a new church in Millersburg, Ohio. I believe you are just the man to assume the pastoral oversight of this baby church, as George and his wife return to Brazil.”

“Well, Ed…that sounds great! Except…I have no sense from God that I should leave Dallas Center.”

“Think about it, Chuck. I’ll be praying for God to show you what He wants.”

So the conversation ended…and I continued happily where we then were – Dallas Center GBC.

A few weeks later the telephone rang again.

“Hello, Chuck. This is Ed Jackson. I have not been able to get you off my mind as God’s man for the Millersburg, Ohio church. It is located in a rural area, which is your background. The people are conservative in their outlook and theology. I just think you should at least meet them and give more consideration to this matter.”

“I’m sorry, Ed. But I really have no sense that my ministry here in Iowa is over yet.”

“Ok, Chuck. But I’m still praying about this.”

Well, that’s over! And life goes on.

About a month later, I had occasion to travel to Columbus, Ohio on some church business. Upon achieving my objective, I suddenly recalled that I was short on some information relating to Brethren Home Missions. It would be only a bit out of my way to go back home by Winona Lake, Indiana, so I did. As I walked into the Home Missions office, who should I meet but Ed Jackson. He asked what I wanted, and proceeded to help me get the information I requested. He also
reinstated me on his list for potential pastors, from which he had removed me after our previous telephone conversation.

Sure enough, a few days later he called again. “Chuck, when I saw you at the Home Missions Office the other day, I felt that God wanted me to approach you again regarding Millersburg. Will you check it out?”

My thoughts immediately went to Samuel, who heard God’s voice three times during the night. Eli’s recommendation, “Speak LORD, Thy servant heareth,” provided me with the response I needed to make. I told Ed that I was ready to meet with the Millersburg people, if he would set a meeting up.

One thing I did not know – in the interim, a man I knew, a very fine man, had candidated at Millersburg. He loves the Lord. He is a student of the Book. He is a good pastor. So-o-o, when the people met to vote on his call…well, it went something like this….One of the women made the very astute observation that this decision was one of the most significant ones before the church. She expressed her conviction that now was the time for the people to be forthright and honest about their thinking. Then she shared her primary concern. Her sense was that the man under consideration did not quite “fit” the people in the church, or the community. While there was no fault to be found with his love for God, his commitment to service, his ability to preach, or even his friendliness, she had a nagging sense that he was not the man for the church at that time. Another lady expressed much the same concern. So, the body acted in acquiescence to those concerns and did not call the him as pastor.

This was the background for Ed Jackson’s third call (related above). And, as the saying goes: “The rest is history.”

One additional note: Since that time, Ed has smilingly told me that the Dallas Center people “still have a rope” ready in case he should return to town. (‘Taint so, Mabel. They love Jesus…and Ed, too.)
Chapter 33

Millersburg GBC

When Janice and I met with the folks at Millersburg, it appeared evident that this was an appointment that God had planned, as well as a ministry for which He had been preparing us. We drove to Holmes County on Saturday to meet some of the people. Dan and Ina Miller were our hosts for the weekend. They drove us around to introduce us to some of the people before the pressures of Sunday came upon us. Later Ina told me that she sensed that I was the one even before we met on that Sunday.

So, our time in Dallas Center came to an end. The time God knew that we (I) needed as a time for personal refreshment, recuperation and refocus. We were encouraged to think that God had placed us there for the benefit of the church as well. Our move to Millersburg, Ohio resulted in our longest term of service (until our later move to Alaska).

Four Millersburg men drove out to Dallas Center to move us to Ohio. (Keith stated that Iowa was the most boring state he had ever seen – nothing but flat fields, and ‘mucho’ corn.) They delivered our furniture to 56 ½ N. Crawford Street, the site of a 100 year-old house that we thoroughly enjoyed for the next 10 years. Janice did her usual thing – making that house our home.

We were meeting in the Junior High School at that time. Every Sunday morning we carried an electronic piano, hymnals and Sunday School supplies into the all-purpose room. We also set up folding chairs for the worship service. Some classrooms were available for Sunday School classes. On Wednesday nights we met in the fire station.

This continued for almost two years, when we felt it was necessary to move. Each October there was an Antique Show held in the school. We had to make arrangements for an alternate meeting place at that time. We had been checking possible sites for relocation and finally settled on one – a building used formerly for a Christian School, and now being used by a small church.
We asked if we could rent the facility for the one Sunday mentioned above. Our people thought it would work well for us, so we talked with the owner. God led him to rent the building to us, so we moved in and began worshipping and serving in and from ‘our’ own home. For seven years that was our church home. There is one additional thing I should add here. At our previous quarterly business meeting we had begun praying that God would allow us to be in our new (rented) church facility by October 15th. This was not a fleece, but rather, a bold request for the glory of God.

Each Sunday two of our ladies gave the count down: “Only 12 weeks until we are moved… Only 10 weeks more to carry in all the equipment and materials… Only ___ weeks…”

On October 15th, we met for worship in the gymnasium. As I opened the service, I said: “Does anyone know what day this is?” “D-Day!” was the reply. We sang: “To God Be the Glory.”

I want to relate an event that God used to help establish the heart and character of the Millersburg GBC. That event provided both a test as well as an opportunity for me, my family, and our church.

Within four months of arriving to be pastor of this “baby” church, Janice and I were informed of David’s alcoholism. Should we tell the church? Will the people think that such a thing should not be, and…? Would they…? Should we…?

I called Dan Miller, the leading layman in the church, to inform him of the situation. Also, that we would be going to Washington, D.C. to help care for Bradley (our grandson) while David was in the hospital. Would he care for prayer meeting tonight? And…please ask the people to pray for David and us.

“Go, Pastor. We’ll be praying. And…don’t worry. Stay as long as you need to. We’ll see that Sunday is cared for too, if you need to be away that long.”

What a blessing! That attitude became part of the “warp and woof” of the church family. Our people were accepting of others who came with their own “baggage.” People found that they could share their burdens and failures with us, because we
had them too. We would pray with them, and seek to encourage and support them through their bleak times as well.

Do you know what God did? (I was hoping you’d ask?) He sent Carl our way. Carl was an alcoholic, and needed help. So we joined together in supporting him. Two of our men drove him to Lynchburg, Virginia, where he was in Jerry Falwell’s Elim House for recovering alcoholics. That Christmas, Janice and I drove to Lynchburg with wrapped Christmas presents for Carl, as an expression of our church’s love and concern for him. When he came home, he was part of our fellowship for a time. So our people were walking with Carl in Millersburg, while we were walking with David in the Washington, D.C. area. We traveled the 800 mile round trip seven times in ten months.

While we were at Millersburg, I was asked to serve the Grace Schools Board as Chairman. Some of that involvement is recorded in chapter forty. I traveled some 30,000 miles a year during that time. There were Board meetings, presidential search meetings, and (some) just plain old meetings.

I had the privilege of doing some teaching at our District Junior Camp. One year I taught the Bible Class some aspects of Bible Doctrine. It was a real thrill to have our junior-age campers return home and report without error the ten major divisions of Bible Doctrine. Then they expanded on the subject of the Bible, with its four sub-points: Revelation, Inspiration, Preservation and Illumination. All these topics had their own key verses also.

It was during the Millersburg years that the “famous” Caribou Hunt took place (see the next chapter) in Alaska.

It was also during the Millersburg years (1987-96) that I underwent my darkest hours in the ministry. I was serving as chairman of the District Ministerium. It was during the time of ferment in the National Conference. Perhaps conflagration is a better word. The debates often produced more heat than light. Decisions were made that led me to the conclusion that I would no longer be able to be a pastor in the district. I went to the pastors for council. As I spoke, I became quite distressed, to the extent that I was hardly able to speak for sobbing. It seemed to
me that, rather than giving council and aid, I received condemnation. For me this was a heart-wrenching, agonizing experience. The worst part, the painful part, lasted perhaps six months, but it seemed to be “forever.”

Finally, the district came to a conclusion that would enable me to continue to serve the Millersburg church in good faith. I finally became at ease regarding my relationship to the district. However, I still felt as though I were an outsider to the pastors, whose fellowship I yearned to have. In time God enabled me to forgive the men for what I perceived to be their ill will toward me. I have since confessed my attitude toward them and requested their forgiveness as well.

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”²⁸

Meanwhile the church was developing. We sensed a need for a “non-rented home,” one that would indicate to community people that we were “for real” in the area. After looking at nine different potential locations, we selected one. That one (we were told) was unavailable. But by this time we had begun to say: “If God wants us to have this, it will become available.”

Imagine our delight when, upon meeting the owner, she turned out to be a delightful lady. Her desire was that her property should be used in a positive way for the good of the community. We suggested that a church should fit the description well, to which she agreed. In fact, when we discussed the cost, her asking price enabled us to purchase the entire property (more than eleven acres) rather than the five we had originally anticipated.

The construction of the church building had some hitches, but it was completed sufficiently for us to occupy it. One of our couples, Reed and Iva Jean Varney, invested a great amount of time at the site, assisting in various ways. Some Brethren Minutemen came, with their expertise, to do brickwork as a gift to God and our church. Since that time, some of the lower level has been made usable for needed classrooms.
During our years at Millersburg, God brought into our lives some very special people. Some were highly instrumental in the early establishment of this fledgling church, while others have continued as key, solid “citizens” through the succeeding years. Dan Miller and Reed Varney were the two men who drove Carl to Elim House in Lynchburg, Virginia. Reed and Iva Jean (his wife) assumed the duty of keeping our “House of God” clean and orderly. This task they faithfully performed all the time Janice and I were living in Millersburg. Names such as Perry and Elaine (whose three sons carried in the electronic piano each Sunday), Jason and Rita, Wynne and Dorothy, Moses and Katie, Venus and Cora, Andy and Cathy, Tom and Debbie, Ken and Sherrie, Keith and Dixie and others all bring floods of memories to mind.

One special memory concerns the time the Yoders first visited the church. Reed and Iva Jean met them at the door and greeted them as only they could - courteously and genuinely. When they returned the next Sunday (to see if we really meant it when we said we cared for people), the Varneys welcomed them...by name (including the girls). This was what 'sold' the Yoders. If people in a church cared enough to remember the names of the children, they must really care.

“Pastoring” is more about people than programs or projects. It certainly involves those other matters, but Jesus’ focus was on meeting the needs of people, so mine should be too.

The next chapter relates a unique experience (the familial kind) I shared with my three sons and one son-in-law. This took place on a vacation trip to Alaska. I wrote about it in a letter to my father.
Dear Dad,

Let me tell a bit of our exciting experience while in Alaska. Our sons desired to give me the experience of a hunting trip while we were there. So-o, we went. It was a caribou hunt down on the Alaska Peninsula. We flew from Kenai down to King Salmon on the Peninsula. From King Salmon, we then flew by floatplane another 1 1/2 hours southward to one of the many lakes where we were left for three days to hunt. We had two tents and a rough lean-to for our facilities.

We arrived on Sunday afternoon, set up camp, had a hot supper and spent the night dreaming of caribou.

The next morning early, we awakened and rushed out to find our prey. In our haste, we neglected to eat a good breakfast (a chocolate-covered granola bar doesn't seem to go as far as, say, eggs-bacon-home fries with coffee or OJ), but we did plan to be back at noon for a hot lunch. Dan and I under Jon's able leadership went directly south while Dave and Kevin (Deborah's husband) went in a southwestward direction. I soon discovered what the words "tundra" and "muskeg" mean. We traversed an area dotted with small lakes (anywhere from 1/4 to 5 acres in extent). The land was somewhat rolling with ridges of up to 75 feet in height. I would estimate that one quarter of the land was swampy. In those areas, at each step, we tended to sink from 4 to 6 inches into the spongy, wet ground. There were basically no trees, although there were bushes growing near the water approximately 3-4 feet in height (I would describe them as the Alaska version of desert sagebrush). There were many types of moss, lichens and other low growing plants among which were some resembling cranberries. These are what the caribou feed on.
From the first ridge behind the camp site, and then the second ridge (perhaps 1/2-3/4 mile distant) we "glassed" the terrain for caribou. Spotting a group perhaps three miles south we set out. After an hour or so, we spotted another group to the west of us. Since they were closer, we moved toward them. I might observe that a lusty wind was blowing from the north (we had no anemometer, but I would estimate the wind speed to be approximately 25-30 mph).

At about 11:30, I forgot to lift up my feet adequately, so, as a result, I fell down. This resulted in getting wet from knees down as well as elbows down. Wet feet and hands never help while hunting, so Daniel gave me one of his two pair of socks while Jonathan gave me his only pair of gloves.

At 12:00 or so, about 5 1/2 miles out, Jonathan shared his lunch with me (another granola bar), while the three of us polished off the quart of water which we had brought along. Suddenly Jonathan said: "Quiet! There are some caribou bedded down ahead of us... about 100 yards." Adrenaline is a wonderful thing. The prey was in sight. The weariness of slogging along through the seemingly never-ending muskeg was forgotten. Two caribou racks could be seen where the band had bedded down. Since we were across wind from them, they did not hear nor smell us as we approached. Stalking was now the name of the game. We endeavored to be inconspicuous by so moving that some of the bushes where they were bedded down acted as a screen. Dan was to our left, Jon in the center while I was on the right or north side. The wind blew from the right to left across our line of approach, thus enabling us to approach to approximately 30 yards before the caribou became apprehensive. By that time we had discerned that there were, not just two, but a number more (at least eight). The first bull we spotted was on the south edge of the group and therefore became Dan's responsibility. The next one we were certain of was on the north side. This one was to be mine. Jon was unselfishly planning for the two of us to get an animal even though it meant not getting one himself.
At 30 yards, the entire group began to rise. "Try for a head shot," were the instructions from my son. But since I had never shot at anything larger than a soft-shelled turtle in the Meramec River, back in Missouri (and that with only a 22 cal. rifle), and, since my two weeks practice at targets with larger rifles hadn't especially impressed me with having an "expert" status as a rifleman, I paused. Suddenly, there he stood...broadside to me. I took aim, fired, and watched to see what would happen.

Wild animals have adrenalin, too. They often go for considerable distance after receiving a death-dealing shot. When this one began to run off, both Jon and I shot at him again, and he went down.

Suddenly I saw another caribou moving away. By his actions I could tell that he had been hit. (In our concentration on the first one, we hadn't heard Dan shoot.) I promptly sought to prevent the second caribou from running off and thereby forcing us to trail him in order to prevent a useless slaughter of game. Dan, meanwhile, was unable to shoot again for fear of hitting either his brother or myself since his animal was moving in such a direction that we were coming into his line of fire. Jon promptly brought aid also and the second caribou was dispatched.

While my two sons dressed the animals, I was resting. Even though we had taken a number of breaks during the morning to rest and to "glass" the area for caribou, I was becoming increasingly weary. We decided to return to camp and bring in the meat the next day, so off we went. We later estimated that we had traveled about six miles going out and that the site of the kill was approximately five miles from camp.

On the way back, we observed that Dave and Kevin had gotten their kills also, for they were packing some of the meat back to camp. Even from a considerable distance we could see the white sacks in which the meat was encased.

At another wet area, I inadvertently soaked my feet again. I was feeling more and more the fact that my normal, sedentary life had not prepared me adequately for this adventure. Not even
my endeavors at walking or exercising. As a result, we took longer and more frequent stops for rest. At about 4:00 P.M., I would estimate, I shared my granola bar with both Dan and Jon. At about 5:00, Daniel went on ahead to bring some food back for me. At 6:00, I told Jonathan that I believed any further endeavor to get to camp would be potentially dangerous for me, so we planned for him to go on while I stayed and rested and waited for him to return with help.

This spot (we discovered) was about 2 1/2 miles from our camp. Not too far, it would seem, to hang on a little longer and make it. But when each rest stop was perhaps 50 yards (I thought, but actually closer to 50-75 feet) from the previous one, and each one became increasingly longer, there comes a point at which the potential of sheer exhaustion brings the danger of hypothermia into focus as a grim reality. So-o-o I stopped.

Jon left me, after having first made certain that I was comfortable (or at least as much as the circumstances allowed). This included getting me settled in a slight depression in the earth which served as a bit of windbreak. He helped me get my poncho adjusted, that is, I sat on the bottom end of the back section and sat cross-legged with the front section covering my knees and feet. This served to help prevent the wind from striking my body and thus cooling me more rapidly. He left his outer coat with me so I could wrap my feet. Since he was going to be traveling rapidly, he felt he wouldn’t require it.

That was at 6:00 P.M.

Jon anticipated being back by at least 8:00 O’clock. So I just settled back to rest and wait. I faced mixed emotions: chagrin that I had been unable to keep going, regret and concern that Dave, Dan, Jon and Kevin would now have this extra burden and worry placed on them and, yes, an awareness of potential unhappiness for the women back in Kenai/Soldotna. I was thankful that I had stopped when I did because it seemed that I was not becoming either disoriented or excessively chilled.

My feet began to become quite cold, so I took off both boots and (wet) socks. After wrapping them in Jon's coat, I
began to massage them. I had a Candle Lantern in my pack, so I lit it and placed it under the poncho between my crossed legs. By keeping my hands and arms inside the poncho, I was able to both warm my hands and further eliminate heat loss by more exposure to the wind.

At 7:30, I looked behind me and saw Jon and Dave coming over the ridge. They had brought the small tent, three sleeping bags, some sandwich "fixings," food for breakfast and some lemonade and some quick energy bars.

While Dave began to set up the tent, Jon came quickly to me to get some fluids and quick energy into me. Never have I enjoyed Country-Time Lemonade as much as I did that evening. While the interests of the day along with the pressures and tensions of the last four hours especially had left me with no particular thirst, I was becoming dehydrated. Two Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups along with a chocolate covered Granola Bar tasted mighty good, too.

When Jon saw that I was bare-footed, he promptly returned to help Dave bring the tent to me. (They had to traverse a low area with more water in it.) As soon as they reached me, Dave grabbed his Mummy sleeping bag and got me into it as quickly as he could. Soon I was lying encased in this bag and able to see only through an opening about 4"x 6" in size. No wind now to draw heat from my body. What a relief!

Meanwhile Jon was setting up the tent. He decided that they should set up the tent right where I was rather than make me move far, so they moved it close enough for me to lift my legs and slide the doorway under them. With their help (since I was now "mummified") I slid on into the tent and the door promptly zipped shut. While Dave completed arrangements outside, Jon proceeded to light the candle lantern again. This makes a remarkable difference in the confines of a tent where the wind in excluded.

After securing the equipment outside the tent, Dave came inside. We proceeded to place food, sleeping bags, clothing, boots and socks (these were frozen by morning) in such a manner
as to allow us to settle in for the night. We ate some supper. I began to feel considerably better. I will admit that I was very willing to forgo the prospect of walking back to the main camp yet that night.

The next morning, we awoke to frozen socks and boots. After some home made cinnamon rolls (Dan’s wife, Sue, had made them for us), we began stirring about. Soon Kevin and Dan arrived from camp. Kevin went to dress out one of the animals which he and Dave had shot the previous day, while our three sons returned to get the two which Dan and I had shot. Kevin brought his meat to our tent. Then he led me back to the main camp, carrying some caribou while I had my rifle and a sleeping bag. What with a considerable number of rests, we arrived at camp at about 1:30 P.M. Kevin promptly prepared some hot stew for our lunch (my first hot meal since Sunday night - this was Tuesday). After eating, he returned to meet the others and help bring back more of the meat. I, on the other hand, gave my energies diligently to rest.

At about 5:30 P.M., they all returned, carrying meat, the tent and other things from the previous night’s "outing.” We had some supper. Jon decided to see if he could get a kill from the herd of 75 or so caribou which we could see about 3/4 miles from our campsite. Kevin and he were gone a couple of hours but without success. At about dark they returned, so we went to bed.

I neglected to say that the lake had frozen over during our stay, which raised the question of a float plane's ability to land on Wednesday to take us home. Well, during Tuesday night it rained and warmed up. The lake thawed, and we had problems with water in, on and around our sleeping bags, clothes, etc.

Wednesday morning, after a hot breakfast (Have you ever made scrambled eggs, fried bacon and coffee on a single gas burner? - and served them all hot? - Dan did.), the four others went back to bring out the remaining meat. After they returned, we struck camp and dried out various items of camp or wearing apparel. At about noon the plane came to fly us out. This time it
was an Otter, which was large enough to carry all of us plus our equipment and meat in one trip.

We had a four hour wait at King Salmon before we were flown to Homer, Alaska, rather than Kenai due to weather which closed the Kenai airport. Diana, Jon's wife, drove their pickup (with a crew cab) down to get us, and so we finally returned home.

To think of flying home to Ohio the next day feeling as I did was a bit much, so we considered it wise to extend our stay from Thursday until the next Monday, which we did.

Back home…back to normalcy again…back to…what? - dreaming about possibly another hunt someday? Well, who knows?

Well, Dad, I thought you might enjoy hearing of yet another episode in the quiet life of "Walter Mitty.” Only this time it was real!

Your son, Charles
MILEPOST #14

Soldotna, Alaska
Chapter 35

Redirection #7

Not all changes in life are made with great clarity and insight. Some are impacted by various, sometimes not even realized, circumstances that become part of the thinking and evaluating process. In retrospect, that seems a fair assessment of the decision to move from Millersburg. Two primary matters effected the decision, although I do believe that God had His gracious hand in even this decision as well.

The first, and primary matter is something motorcyclists call "Low Visual Horizon." By that they refer to the tendency of bikers to begin watching the ground close to where they are riding. This is done with a very good motive: they are watching for unexpected bumps or debris in the path of their bike. That’s good. But…in so doing they inadvertently fail to keep the big picture in mind (low visual horizon), and thereby fail to plan adequately for the “farther down the road” need.

That happened to me. We had worked hard and well building the church. During that time the normal program of the church continued. But…I had somehow lost a sense of “what next?” Not infrequently, after the completion of such a project, the people (including the pastor) are just plain tired. Unless there is a vision for the next step, there is danger of loss of vision for the future. This leads to a further sense of futility, and many times a pastor comes to feel that his ministry has come to an end. So, he resigns. And that was a strong factor in my decision.

Another contributing factor was the dismay I detailed two chapters ago, regarding my relationship within the district. I had not yet been able to work through the issues of my heart and my hurt. Praise the Lord, that has become a thing of the past. Certainly I remember it. But it is now a “historical memory” (one that recognizes the facts) as opposed to an “emotional memory,” which reproduces the emotions of the actual incident.
So I resigned, once again not knowing where we would be going. Janice and I communicated the facts to our children for their awareness and prayer support.

For some years, our son Daniel and I had talked about “someday” working together in a church. He expressed interest in the possibility, but I knew that the first priority of Peninsula Grace Brethren Church in Soldotna, Alaska was a Youth Pastor. “My” position was about two years off. That was all right.

Then an amazing thing took place. The focus of attention was on Jeremy Foster, a college student, who demonstrated an interest in the position. At the same time, Don Nagle, who had been training Youth Pastors for some fifteen years, contacted the church about coming to Alaska on a sabbatical. He wished to work on his Doctor’s Degree. He would also be willing to mentor someone in youth ministry.

At an Elder Board meeting, several elders began expressing their concern for ministry among the adults in the church, with some emphasis on the senior citizens.

Suddenly it appeared that God had put it all together. Jeremy was single, and could live at home. The Nagles required no salary. The Elders considered, and decided that the church could, and should, invite me to come on staff also. God had done it again! He made the next step clear.

Our home sold in two days…for twice what we paid for it ten years earlier.

With genuine sorrow we left Millersburg, Ohio. It was during our time there that we had the privilege of again being close to Janice’s mother. (In the early 1960s, our first church, Galion, was only 16 miles away.) Also, for the first time since we were married Janice was able to be close to her sister Joan, who with her husband, Evan Adams lived in Butler, Ohio. Her brother Carl Baer, with his wife Carolee, lived in nearby Mansfield. We shared a number of special days with them and Mom during the final years of her earthly journey (she lived to be 99 1/2 years of age).
Chapter 36

Peninsula GBC

We concluded our ministry at Millersburg on the last of June, 1996. Our first stop was a Thornton family reunion in northern Illinois. From there we drove to Missoula, Montana, where we spent a few days with our daughter Rebekah, her husband, Rodney, and their children. We went spelunking in a cave in Lewis and Clark State Park. Then we drove “North to Alaska” on the Alcan Highway.

It was a delightful trip. The most memorable part took place one day when we were out of range of both radio and cell phone (the Jones family loaned us one for the trip.) We had talked, discussed and debated everything we could think of, not once…but (it seemed) at least three times. Janice was bravely endeavoring to maintain some sort of conversation, when I began humming a song. Then, without giving it much thought, I began to sing the words: “I didn’t know the gun was loaded, and I’m so sorry my friend. I didn’t know the gun was loaded, and I’ll never, never do it again.”

Janice became very quiet.

Then, when I realized what I had done, we both had a good laugh. But…that isn’t the last of this story. We finally reached Tok, Alaska, where we spent the night. The next morning we drove to a restaurant for breakfast. I think we were looking forward to hearing people talk as much as, or more than eating. We were the first ones to arrive. So we ordered. Then, two buses drove into the parking lot. Boy, were we ready to hear people! When they walked in, we discovered they were a tour group of mutes, who were conversing, all right, but in sign language. The sheer unexpectedness of that situation caused us to laugh. That morning we saw our first moose, crossing the highway in front of us. What a magnificent sight! Then as we drove westward, we watched as God painted a glorious sunrise on the western mountains in different, ever-changing shades of pink. Our Alaskan adventure had begun.
On July 15 we officially began our new ministry with the Peninsula Grace Brethren Church of Soldotna, Alaska. New church, new people, new opportunities, all these now stood before me. The church staff took Janice and me out to lunch the first day. They presented me with an office desk set. You know – pens in their holders, wooden “In” box, wooden “Note Paper” box, wooden handled letter opener, and matching stapler and staple remover. Could I live up to the standard of this desk set?

Meanwhile Carmen, Jeannie and Barbara (our ladies in the church office) were trying to figure me out. You know – is he stiff and formal? (After all, whenever he spoke on the phone he always identified himself as Charles Thornton.) Will he be warm and friendly? How will he treat the rest of us? After all he is old enough to be our father.

They soon learned that I was...well, I was...just me. The warmth of the office spirit was wonderful. We laughed together at my endeavors to learn to use a computer. (Who else used a spreadsheet to do word processing, because he couldn’t figure out how to indent the first line of a sentence?) I was quickly informed that the coffee maker was not for making coffee; it was for making hot water for soup or tea. (Now why should I think anything else? What a ridiculous mistake – but obviously a goof a fellow from Ohio might make.) We had fun but a lot of things were accomplished by that staff.

One key area of responsibility was Adult Education. It was exciting to work at teaching as well as seeking to develop a more effective adult teaching ministry in PGBC. During the past ten years, the Sunday worship time has been changed several times in order to adjust for either growing or declining attendance. At one time we had Sunday School followed by Worship. Then we had a “sandwich” situation – two Worship services with Sunday School “sandwiched” between. Then we had “Flip-Flop” services (two worship services with classes during each). As I write these words, we are again having Sunday School followed by Worship. These things, combined with the
normal ebb and flow of the population, are part of the mix that goes into church work.

What a joy it is to serve the Lord, teach God’s Word, and work with other Christians in the body. An additional privilege has been that of fellowshipping with pastors from other churches. We have weekly prayer together. Once a month we share in a pastor’s lunch. This reminds us that the Body of Christ is more than just “our” local church. With some of these men I have developed something of a David-Jonathan kinship.

Then there has been the great joy of being close to our children. David, Daniel, Deborah and Jonathan, along with their families, have contributed so much to both Janice and me. The thirteen years between Sunnyside, Washington and Soldotna, Alaska were years in which we saw our family members only briefly at vacation times. Here we could connect with them frequently. On special occasions we would have a family dinner at one of our homes, all the while regretting that Rebekah and Rodney, with their family, in Washington State, could not be with us.

I have appreciated the opportunities of interacting with Daniel on some of the issues that face pastors in their work. More recently, I have benefited from his studies toward a Doctor’s Degree in Biblical Studies. He has let me ‘look over his shoulder’ as he does written work in the various courses.

Since moving to Alaska, I have had the privilege of serving with the Kenai Peninsula Marriage Savers (Chapter 40) and the Arctic Barnabas Ministries (Chapter 41). Each of these is a significant organization devoted to helping people in the name of, and for the glory of, Jesus Christ. I have been involved also in a small way with the Alaska Christian Ministries Convention, both as a local Board member and, on occasion, as a workshop leader. On one occasion I had the privilege of going to Kodiak Island to lead a workshop at their Convention. On another I was able to introduce a couple to the Anchorage Convention. They presented training in the use of “Reconciling God’s Way,” a study designed to assist people work out their marital struggles.
Since arriving in Alaska, both Janice and I have served as members of the church’s Mission Commission. We were involved in planning for and/or participating in several Mission trips: to Ensenada, Mexico (1997, 1998, 1999 – with 23, 42, and 42 people respectively involved), Then to Papalote, Mexico in 2004, with another team.

I was able to travel to San Pedro Yususqua, a village in the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, with Dick Swanson and Ed French, two of our church men. There we were able to minister for a few days, as well as prepare to assist the church there by helping provide for some building materials needed to construct a church. At that time they were meeting in the pastor’s home, while his family lived in two lean-tos built at each end of the house proper.

As we left the village to return home, flat tires forced us to ride back to Tlaxiaco, Mexico (where we were lodging) to purchase new tires. Tony Heredia, our missionary to Mexico as well as leader for this trip, led the driver to salvation while we were driving to town.

I was able to make two trips to Villa Hidalgo, in Sonora State, Mexico, where we were able to assist our baby church in being “birthed.” Then, through our church’s Mission giving, we provided the finances for purchasing property and constructing a church building.

During these years, our church sent three Mission Teams to Northern Luzon in the Philippines. There they shared in contacting as yet unreached natives with the Gospel. Through the years we have seen Christ build His church among the Ifugao people of the Banaue Rice Terrace country.
MILEPOST #15

Special Opportunities
Chapter 37

Grace Schools Board of Trustees

Beginning with the 1982 winter meeting of the Grace College and Seminary Board of Trustees, I was appointed to fill the unexpired term of Jesse Deloe, who stepped off the Board to become Assistant to the School’s President. Thus began a seventeen year opportunity to serve the school that God used as an instrument in my training for pastoral ministry.

For the first nine years I served on the Trustee Commission of the Board, serving as its chairman for a number of those years. Beginning in 1992, I was elected chairman of the full board. After five years as chairman, I stepped off the Executive Committee and completed my tenure through 1999, again as a member of the Trustee Commission.

During the seventeen years I was on the Grace Board, the schools faced some very serious tests: a) a major internal struggle that threatened to divide the faculty, administration and students, b) two presidential searches, and c) financial stresses that caused the board to seriously question whether Grace would open its doors to students for a couple of years. Some of these things transpired during my tenure as chairman. Upon reflection, I recall one description of some early centuries of the Christian Era (when there were a number of councils held, in order to address serious doctrinal issues): "The highways were crowded with galloping Bishops." I did not "crowd the highway.” but I did spend considerable time traveling to and from Winona Lake, Indiana on board business.

During those years the board became aware of the priority need for changing from a "good old boy" setup (where we were treated like kings and queens, whenever we came on campus, while actually doing little beyond saying: “Atta boy! Go to it” to the administration) to a proactive, working board that would be a true resource for the administration in fulfilling its responsibilities. God gave the administration the grace to allow
both the board and its leadership to work its way through the learning curve involved in becoming a more effective board.

Since Grace Schools has always been a key component in the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches (FGBC), debates and struggles within the FGBC also impacted the board in its work. I recall vividly how the attitudes and actions of the sitting presidents contributed to board actions and reactions during those difficult times.

My connection to Grace Schools has, so far, covered a span of some fifty years. During that time I have interacted with each of its five presidents. God used each one to impact my life in some unique way.

Dr. Alva J. McClain, founder, president and theology professor, showed me the beautiful way the various biblical doctrines mesh with each other, while yet retaining their own individuality. Rather than a bunch of seemingly disconnected sets of truth, he taught an orderly, consistent full-orbed theology that I could ‘latch on to,’ and then teach with confidence.

Dr. Herman Hoyt became the second president of Grace. While the Dean of the Seminary (when I was a student) I learned a great lesson. Our class was called together at the beginning of our senior year, and Dr. Hoyt gave us very clear instructions. The critical monograph was the final work of the seminary student and gave an indication of his ability to think, study and write in the arena of theological studies. Since students in previous years had taken increasing advantage of leniency toward deadlines in submitting their critical monograph work, the time had come to require promptness in meeting the deadline. There would be severe penalties for failure to keep to the schedule and if any student failed to make the scheduled deadlines, he would be unable to graduate with his class.

As I progressed through the year, it became obvious that I would be unable to meet the first major scheduled date for my work. I went to Dr. Hoyt’s office to talk with him. After I had told him my dilemma, He reflected a bit, then said: “Now, Brother Thornton, may I remind you that the word ‘Grace’ isn’t a
part of the name of our school for no reason…” He then proceeded to inform me that those drastic warnings were intended to serve as a prod for those students who were prone to abuse the system and endeavor to slide by. He concluded by encouraging me to get my work done as quickly as possible, and that I would not be penalized for tardiness.

What an example of grace in action! I have never forgotten that lesson. A man who represented the utmost in commitment to excellence in study, work, schedules, and Christian service; who had little patience with slackers; who demanded that things be done both well and on time, showed kindness to a me a student, who wasn’t ‘measuring up.’ Since that time, I have endeavored to demonstrate the same thoughtfulness and awareness of the struggles that others go through in their desire to follow Jesus Christ.

I first met Dr. Homer Kent, Jr. when I matriculated in 1956 as a beginning student at Grace Theological Seminary. Through the over fifty years I have known him, he has demonstrated both an example and a challenge. These have impressed me in two ways. First, he demonstrated that great experience in pastoral ministry is not a pre-requisite to effective use of the Word of God. His primary ministry for over fifty years has been in the ‘halls of learning’ (often equated with non-practical things). Yet he has a way of making God’s Word so plain and relevant that his books (though quite scholarly) have become a most helpful resource for pastors and teachers who are either just ‘getting their feet wet’ or have been in the trenches for years.

Second, during his tenure as third president of Grace, Dr. Kent demonstrated to me the manner in which one may, and should, respond to the setbacks of life in a God honoring way. I watched him live through situations that would have made lesser men fall. But through them all he showed a sweet, godly spirit, coupled with a consistent attitude of cooperation and helpfulness.

Dr. Kent might well say (with the Apostle Paul): “Be imitators of me, even as I am of Christ.” 29
Dr. John J. Davis succeeded Dr. Kent. This man of God has demonstrated two great qualities of life and service to me. During his tenure as president of Grace Schools, I was deeply impressed with his commitment to bring glory to God by doing all things with excellence. Whether it was a banquet or a basketball game, a fund-raising venture or a fishing expedition, Dr. Davis felt it must be done well – to the best of one’s ability. All those things reflect our opinion of the God we serve and, therefore, should be done with excellence. What an inspiration – to make every event of the church (my job) or Grace Schools (his job) one that would indicate that we consider the best we could do as the least we would do for the sake of our God.

Dr. Davis also demonstrated to me his profound commitment to honor God in his ministry, even though it might well cost him personal popularity and acceptance with some people. Through some very difficult times at Grace Schools, he was willing to ‘bite the bullet’; make the tough decisions and face the ‘flack’ that often comes with doing so. Yet I observed him graciously, but firmly stand for the right and act for the right even at the possible cost of personal friendship, prestige and position. This man’s dedication to his responsibilities became a vital ingredient in the ongoing life and ministry of Grace Schools. He was willing to accept the fact that the position he held called for sacrifice that few were willing to endure. He gave me an example to follow; a pattern of faith in action that has challenged me to be faithful to the trust placed in me by my churches through the years.

I learned from watching him, that sometimes a leader must do the hard thing simply because it is the right thing. I also discovered that, many times, only time reveals the true significance of a man’s actions as a leader. What an example this has been for me during subsequent years in ministry leadership.

The fifth, and current, president of Grace Schools is Dr. Ronald Manahan. Dr. Manahan has come to mean much more than an administrator of a school of higher education. He has come to be one to whom I refer as my friend. I have watched him
during the tense times of considerable change on both Grace Schools Campus and the Grace Board of Trustees. I observed his quiet confidence in God’s oversight and ultimate control of the destiny of the schools. I was recipient of his wise counsel and gracious patience as the board struggled through its growing pains during a time of drastically needed change. His manner of empowering people to step forward and assume responsibilities of leadership has served as a pattern for me in my own ministry.

During those same days, I saw and sensed his great love and devotion for his wife, Barbara, as she underwent the rigors of treatment for cancer. Somehow, the exigencies and demands of leadership and the exceedingly public nature of his position were not permitted to rob his wife and family of the love, support and presence of husband and father.

For these things I have been, and still am, thankful. I have been encouraged to follow that example in my own life and ministry.

All five of these men have influenced me in significant ways. I rather doubt that they are aware of that fact, but it is true, nonetheless. And I believe God definitely had His gracious hand in permitting me to be involved during that seventeen year period of Grace Schools’ history.
Chapter 38

Iowa Sunday School Association

Within three months of moving to Dallas Center, Iowa in 1983 as pastor of the Grace Brethren Church, I was asked to serve on the ISSA (Iowa Sunday School Association) Board. Thus began four years of delightful service for Christ and fellowship with some of His servants. In reflecting on that time, I marvel at the way God provides for the needs of His people…even though it may be in ways unanticipated.

The ISSA Committee was composed of men and women from a broad spectrum of theological understanding. There was, however, one common passion that bound us together. That passion was a commitment to honor Jesus Christ, God’s eternal Son, our Savior and Master, by providing a quality Christian Education Convention each year in the State of Iowa. In accomplishing that objective, we set aside our differences and focused on the glory of God, the greatness of Christ and enabling people in the churches of Iowa to fulfill the Great Commission.

Our fellowship with one another was sweet. Our commitment to support and encourage each other was special. I discovered some aspects of our fellowship to be deeper and more meaningful than that of our FGBC pastors.

I had the privilege of serving the ISSA Committee as Vice Chairman. Then, later, I was named Assistant to the Chairman. In both of those positions I felt I was able to serve in areas of my strength.

During the winter of 1986, I was invited to Cedar Falls, Iowa as speaker at the CE Banquet of a church there. It was Saturday evening and I was scheduled to preach at Dallas Center the next day, as usual. During the evening snow began falling. It quickly became heavy and began drifting. Despite the conditions I felt I should drive home.

Along the way, snow was drifting across the highway as much as a foot and a half deep in places. After about three hours (the trip normally took 1 ½ hours), I arrived home. The next day
we had to cancel church because of excessive snow blocking the roads in our area.

It was at an ISSA Committee appreciation dinner, following one of our conventions, that I had the delight of presenting, a “Christian Executive Ramrod” to the Chairman and also reading the accompanying explanation (see Addendum #4).

It was while in Iowa that I had the privilege of leading some workshops and seminars, especially in the area of children’s ministry.
Chapter 39

Marriage Savers

Is there a way to stem the tide of self-destructing marriages in Alaska? Some recent statistics indicate that for every two marriages in the USA, one ends in divorce.

In the spring of 2000, I came across Michael McManus’ book, *Marriage Savers*. I read it and God began burdening my heart with a growing awareness of the tragic multiplication of divorces, not only on the Kenai Peninsula, but across the entire USA.

But…let’s back up a bit for some perspective. God very seldom works in a vacuum. He prepares both the plan and the people who will be involved. Until I became a pastor I had very little contact with either the subject of divorce, or any people involved. I was aware of only one divorce in my extended family, and that was during my teen years, when an uncle and aunt were divorced. (I eventually came to the realization that there were a number more.) Through the intervening years of pastoring, I simply worked along with the issues involving family struggles as they arose. Michael McManus, however, was used by God to open my eyes and break my heart.

By the year 2000, I was inundated with the sad truth of marriage difficulties that often led to divorce. By this time I could count at least three divorces among my siblings…and an additional three among my children, plus another involving a grand-child. At that ‘close range’ view, one can hardly escape awareness of the terrible stress and devastation such things bring. It affects the immediate couple. Any children they have face severe trauma. Their siblings and extended families are brought into this maelstrom of emotion. There are often long-term emotional and financial repercussions.

*Marriage Savers* provided a workable means for addressing this problem. After talking about this with my son, Dan (our Senior Pastor, with whom I then served as Associate), he gave me his blessing to focus time and energy on the project.
In fact, he gladly encouraged me to share the concepts of becoming a “Marriage Saver Church” with our Elder Board. In late fall, 2000, our elders accepted the concept and later adopted a church policy that basically includes all of the Community Marriage Covenant items.

In late 2000 and early, 2001, I began sharing the ‘dream’ with pastors (first Tuesday pastors’ lunch, pastor prayer groups, denominational ministerial groups, individual pastors, etc.). By this time I had developed an overhead transparency presentation that included marriage/divorce statistics for the State and our Borough (comparable to counties in other states), population stats, and information regarding results in areas where there is a Marriage Policy in place (such as Modesto, California).

After receiving general agreement and support from a number of pastors, I sought out four other pastors to serve as a leadership team to develop a Community Covenant. One of these men has uniquely served as my Vice-Chairman and given most supportive aid. God brought Paul Kupferschmid and me together and his support and cooperation have been invaluable. The rest of the committee has been very supportive. They have pretty well accepted my leadership and proposals and supported them.

After studying several other Community Covenants, we developed the Kenai Peninsula Marriage Savers Covenant. Then, at a community worship service on Palm Sunday night, April 3, 2001, 25 pastors, representing 20 churches, publicly signed the Covenant.

As a result of the marriage savers emphasis, Janice and I have frequently been involved in helping couples who desire to build stronger marriages. Some have been on the brink of divorce. Other just “want it to be better.” What a joy it has been to offer them encouragement and a positive means of either strengthening or restoring their relationships.

My personal ministry is richer and, I think, deeper than it was before KPMS began.
Chapter 40

Arctic Barnabas Ministries

In 2001 I met Joel Caldwell. He had recently left a ministry with MARC (Missionary Aviation Repair Center in Soldotna, Alaska) for the purpose of beginning Arctic Barnabas Ministries, an organization designed to provide support and encouragement to missionaries and pastors in bush Alaska.

As he began talking, I discovered that his heart beat with a like passion as my own – a deep longing to “stand alongside” God’s servants who labor in isolation. I eagerly accepted the invitation to join the ABM Board. It has brought me great joy to stand alongside some of God’s choice servants who seek ways to encourage and aid those who minister in bush Alaska. One reason is that I have some sense of what they experience – having served as solo pastor in somewhat isolated situations (geography is not the only way to be isolated). Another is that God gave me a gift of encouragement, which I long to use for His glory.

I have seen God grow a ministry from two people (Joel and his wife, Gail) to seven families, with another two soon to come on board. What thrill to see a Ministry Family Retreat that brings together scattered servants for interaction and inspiration. These same people go back to their local works with a new sense of “belonging.” The staff members of ABM actively encourage their bush families by letters, phone calls, e-mail, occasional visits, tea parties (a unique way of bringing special fellowship to wives), and Minute Man teams to provide special work projects.

I have watched as God brought resources to ABM by various means. (Yes, Mabel, an airplane is a viable resource for people who minister to those who live in the half of Alaska that is off the road system.) Through such means churches are encouraged and the tenure of bush pastors is lengthened. If “Jonathan…arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God,” why should not ABM Staff personnel do the same?
Chapter 41

Doctoral Studies

Through thirty-six years of pastoral ministry I was thrilled at the privilege of opening God’s Word to the people He entrusted to me. However, I began to sense the truth of the proverb: “If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength…”31 I concluded that I should “whet the iron” in order to better “rightly divide the word of truth.”32 Since I do better learning in the context of both a teacher and a class, in January, 1996 I sat in a classroom at Grace Theological Seminary for the first of eight units of the Doctor of Ministry program. From that time until the spring of 2003 I had the privilege of planned “sharpening.” My children helped with tuition costs.

Old Testament Preaching and Teaching, Foundations for Ministry, Marriage and Family Counseling, and The Effective Counselor were most helpful as I began applying principles and methods in ministry.

The counseling courses were particularly profitable. The concluding project assignment for the Marriage and Family Counseling course led to my writing a syllabus: “Building and Strengthening Relationships.” I have used this course in several group situations, as well as for personal or couples counseling.

I was a guest in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bickel when I attended the lectures at Grace. One memory that remains is of sitting in the living room couch and seeing a plaque on the wall directly opposite that read: “Thou shalt not whine.” (There is now a similar plaque on the wall in a classroom at our church.)

I have another memory, which was a source of laughter, coupled with embarrassment. One Sunday afternoon I drove to Winona Lake so I would be “bright-eyed and bushy-tailed” for my D. Min. class the following day. As usual, I planned to stay at the Bickels’ home. Upon my arrival, I discovered that they were not home. Assuming that they were at church, I went out for some supper. They were still gone when I returned. To make a
long story short, I slept in my car, cleaned up in a Grace College bathroom, and reported for class on time…only to discover that I was one week early for my class. You can imagine Janice’s surprise when I arrived back home in Millersburg, Ohio, at 1:00 pm Monday. A week later, the Bickels shared a good laugh.

Upon moving to Alaska in July, 1996, I discovered that my work load had picked up (see previous chapter for one example). The cost of travel to Indiana for lectures became more prohibitive. In addition, I was unable to attend the lecture sessions for the Practice of Ministry Leadership course due to acquiring serious back stress while on vacation. So completion of that unit was at least delayed. Finally, I had only begun the reading program for the Conflict Resolution in Church and Ministry course when I decided to step out of the program.

Every course I was able to take was immediately usable in ministry – whether preaching and teaching, Marriage Savers leadership and counseling, or in the realm of church leadership. The value of the studies has become very evident to me. I have gained fresh insights into the Word of God. I have acquired new tools to use in counseling others. My physical and emotional zest for serving God has been renewed. Even my desire for on-going study has been reinforced.

Some of the words of this chapter are being written while I am at Equip 07, the annual conference of the FGBC. This year the emphasis is on training and continuing education. While it is true that “of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh,”\(^\text{33}\) still we read the words of Paul: “Study to show thyself approved unto God…”\(^\text{34}\)

I would be remiss if I neglected to add that currently I have the privilege of ‘looking over the shoulder’ of Daniel, our son, as he studies for his Doctor’s Degree in Biblical Studies. My mind is stretched as I consider some of the questions he addresses in his endeavor to sharpen the tools in his “toolbox.”
MILEPOST #16

Special Joys
Chapter 42

Writing

Words have always interested me. With words, we communicate ideas, intentions and instructions. Those things may be expressed either orally or in written or printed form. I “make my living” by speaking (a significant part of the work of a ‘vocational’ pastor), it is true, but I seek to make good use of the written word as well.

In the spring of 1959, I wrote my first, significant item – The Righteousness of the Law: Romans 8:4. This was part of my final year in the Master of Divinity program at Grace Theological Seminary, in Winona Lake, Indiana.

In January, 2007, I published my first book, One of Seven Thousand (a biography of my father, Samuel Watson Thornton).

In between, I have enjoyed the opportunity to use the written word to communicate in various ways. Under various titles, such as “Pastoral Ramblings,” or “The Grapevine,” I have been able to send periodic messages to my church people.

Then there is the “Annual Christmas Letter.” Actually I came to call it the “Year-end – Year-beginning Letter,” since I frequently missed the “Year-end” part. This opened up another arena of personal writing interest, in that I began to use poetry as well as prose in my writing.

Because of my love for humor, I also began to make use of the talents of my friend from the Ozarks – Caleb Greenapple Trueblood. He has been able to express some things in ways better than I, since he is not quite so bound by the dictates of grammar or political correctness.

Since moving to Alaska, I have had the privilege of writing columns for The Peninsula Clarion, our local newspaper. “The Minister’s Message” has provided that opportunity to express something of God’s goodness to needy people.

I love the stories I’ve heard throughout my life – stories of my parents, grandparents, and on back up the family tree. Those stories will fade from memory, unless they are recorded. I
wanted to share something more definite than simple oral history with my children. So, on January 7, 2007 the first of three printings of *One in Seven Thousand* (my father’s biography) came off the press. Even though the book is short (100 pages), it is an endeavor to preserve some knowledge of former generations for our posterity. This endeavor, coupled with a directive from Rebekah (daughter number two) led to this present ‘tome.’

**Snippets**

That book went through three printings, and has had international distribution. (Doesn’t that sound exciting and huge?) Actually the books printed total 190. The “international” part can be stated because one copy was mailed to Japan.

Poetry has also long been a love of mine. During the days of WWII I sang an unending song about Drafty and “Oinie,” making up verses as I went. (“Drafty and Ernie” was a strip in the funny papers.) One special time for such singing was while I fed the chickens. I concocted new verses to the tune: “Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition.”

A few samples may be found among the Addenda of this volume. So, whether it was a poem to honor Rebekah’s 30th birthday (p.190), or “Caleb’s Faith” (p.188), or the story of a bear hunt in verse (p.181), or the lyrics of a worship song (p.191), I have had great joy in “taking pen in hand.”

Words also intrigue me. So whether it is a game of Scrabble, a cross-word puzzle, or the “Word of the Day,” which I have shared with friends from time to time, I thoroughly appreciate the many-faceted ways to communicate with people. When I read of one fellow’s conviction that “It is a sin to bore people with the marvelous truth of God’s Word,” I began thinking of fresh ways to express God’s “always fresh” message to others.
Chapter 43

Music

“Heaven’s harmony, sweet the melody,
Bringing to the lost salvation’s story,
Telling of His love, coming from above
To earth’s fallen race, making men free.
Oh would you
Join with heaven’s throng, sing redemption’s song,
In the land where joy never will end?
Won’t you come today? Sorrows and cares all cast away,
When comes sweet heaven’s harmony.”

These words were the first that the audience heard when the St. Louis Gospelaires began a concert. To be a part of that quartet for some eight months was a treat. We often sang at the Youth for Christ Rally, held in the Keil Auditorium in St. Louis, Missouri. There were two unique opportunities in which I was able to share. The first was a Leadership Exchange night, when the St. Louis YFC leaders switched places with the Kansas City YFC leaders. Our quartet was invited to be involved. So we drove to Kansas City on Saturday, held the YFC Rally that night, and drove back to St. Louis afterward.

Second, we were invited to present a concert at the Masonic Lodge. We asked no questions, but we made it clear what we sang about – knowing, trusting and serving Jesus Christ. There were no limitations placed on what we sang, so we presented our usual program. It included the message of the Gospel both in song as well as by word of mouth. Some years earlier I had heard Billy Graham say that he would go anywhere, under anybody, just as long as he could preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This was one of those special opportunities for us.

But it didn’t begin there. In my childhood home we had “Prayers.” That was what we called our daily family altar time. Our usual practice was to gather in the living room after breakfast to sing accompanied by Mom on the piano. Then we read a
chapter of Scripture, taking turns around the family circle. Either Dad or Mom would pronounce the hard words as we children read (each child began when he/she was able to read “I, the, and, ran…” - you get the idea). Then Dad would pray. At the end of his prayer, he led us all in praying the Lord’s Prayer.

Music was an integral part of our education all through elementary school. We sang songs, such as: “Weeping Willow,” “On the King’s Highway,” or “Winding Down the Mountain to the Sea.” We also played the Tonette (an instrument made of black plastic, which had just come on the market in 1938) either as solo or ensemble.

I well remember the time our family was visiting our grandparents in St. Louis. On Sunday our family stood before this large (400-500) church and sang “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” (Hymn #50) to them.

In the Galion church, our first Christmas musical was a two-part Christmas Cantata. We had eight to ten people who prepared and presented it in the storefront building that served as our church home.

I sang in the Galion Community Chorus at the Messiah presentation each Christmas season. Dr. Horowitz, our family doctor, served as first violinist in the local instrumental ensemble that accompanied the chorus.

Later, at Buena Vista, Virginia, the “Charles Brothers” trio sang occasionally. Charles Armentrout, Charles ("Buddy") Smals, and Charles (himself) Thornton made up that group. Then, again, Buddy and Jim Smals, Charles Armentrout and I sang as a quartet.

Later at the Washington D.C. church our family sang while I played my guitar. That contrasted somewhat with the pipe organ and piano that normally accompanied the singing. Both Janice and I participated in the cantatas we presented there, as well as after the church moved to Lanham.

In every church we participated in the music ministry. Just “practicing for the heavenly choir” some day, you know.
Chapter 44

Laughter

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine,” said the wise son of David. How true that is in life! Whether it is light-hearted banter among friends, the comic actions of a clown, or the deep inner joy that suffuses the demeanor of a child of God who is traversing some deep, dark canyon of experience, the language of the heart speaks loud and clear.

Of all the people in Jesus’ circle of acquaintance while He walked on earth, I cannot think of any who was more joyful than He. After all, He was His Father’s Son. The One with an eternal relationship with the One Who created the duck-billed platypus, the playful otter, the chimpanzee and the mockingbird.

So from the days when laughter rang through our home (especially when Uncles Perce and Charlie Gash were visiting) until today, I have loved laughter. To this day, when my siblings get together, laughter rings out. My own children have also caught the “bug.” When we have a family get-together, we look forward to interesting stories of hunts, hikes and yard sales. We also eagerly listen to recollections of humorous incidents as well as jokes.

Perhaps you, too, will smile as I relate one instance in my life. It came about that, while we were living in Lanham, Maryland, it became necessary for me to drive a school bus. For two years I had the privilege of transporting public school children to and from various schools on my route.

Each morning and afternoon, I met other drivers at the bus lot. There we prepped our buses, had coffee in the bus shack, and visited. On one occasion, one of the lady drivers stated: “Chuck, you are the gayest driver I have ever known.”

We-l-l-l, I thought about that for a moment. Then I smiled, and said: “Thank you. I think I know what you mean by that statement, although some people might think differently, in light of today’s headlines.”
She blushed at the possible inference, but was reassured by my smile. I am satisfied that many Christians have poor testimonies simply because they have no (or at least very little) sense of humor.

On another occasion, the foreman of our bus lot got a laugh when he stated: “Chuck, did you notice (as he pointed to the bare studding that had been installed in the back of the bus shack for future bathrooms) that they’re building a confessional for your use?” He was a non-practicing Catholic, and enjoyed telling jokes.

He was the one who saw to it that I never missed a day’s pay when I took time off for our District Church Conference or for Ministerial meetings. When I reminded him that I had missed for a “non sick” reason, he laughed and told me that he had turned me in as sick, so I would not miss any pay. My conclusion was simple: 1) I had not asked for the pay, 2) I expected to be ‘docked,’ and 3) he had done this on his own initiative. I therefore concluded 4) that this was God’s way of making provision for me.

This past Mother’s Day (2007), Janice and I had the joy of eating dinner with our three sons, their wives, and any of their children who were around. Along with the good food went good conversation. Inevitably, some of the old stories were retold – often having become slightly embellished since the last telling. The sheer joy of family, along with the remembering of times past, all served up with a happy smile and a hearty laugh, once again reminded us of how greatly blessed we are with the family God has given us.

Truly, “the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.” (Ps 16:6)
Some years ago I had occasion to read the life story of Samuel Shoemaker. In that book was included the following poem. Something of his personal passion to serve God well seized me. It gripped my heart. It thrilled my soul. It expressed much better than I could the passion I long to live out as a servant of the King of Kings.

I Stand by the Door
by Sam Shoemaker

I stand by the door.
I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out,
The door is the most important door in the world-
It is the door through which people walk when they find God.
There's no use my going way inside, and staying there,
When so many are still outside and they, as much as I,
Crave to know where the door is.
And all that so many ever find
Is only the wall where a door ought to be.
They creep along the wall like blind people,
With outstretched, groping hands.
Feeling for a door, knowing there must be a door,
Yet they never find it ...
So I stand by the door.

The most tremendous thing in the world
Is for people to find that door--the door to God.
The most important thing any person can do
Is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands,
And put it on the latch--the latch that only clicks
And opens to the person's own touch.
People die outside that door, as starving beggars die
On cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of winter—
Die for want of what is within their grasp.
They live, on the other side of it--live because they have not found it.
Nothing else matters compared to helping them find it,
And open it, and walk in, and find Him ...
So I stand by the door.

Go in, great saints, go all the way in--
Go way down into the cavernous cellars,
And way up into the spacious attics--
It is a vast roomy house, this house where God is.
Go into the deepest of hidden casements,
Of withdrawal, of silence, of sainthood.
Some must inhabit those inner rooms.
And know the depths and heights of God,
And call outside to the rest of us how wonderful it is.
Sometimes I take a deeper look in,
Sometimes venture in a little farther;
But my place seems closer to the opening ...
So I stand by the door.

There is another reason why I stand there.
Some people get part way in and become afraid
Lest God and the zeal of His house devour them
For God is so very great, and asks all of us.
And these people feel a cosmic claustrophobia,
And want to get out. "Let me out!" they cry,
And the people way inside only terrify, them more.
Somebody must be by the door to tell them that they are spoiled
For the old life, they have seen too much:
Once taste God, and nothing but God will do any more.
Somebody must be watching for the frightened
Who seek to sneak out just where they came in,
To tell them how much better it is inside.
The people too far in do not see how near these are
To leaving--preoccupied with the wonder of it all.
Somebody must watch for those who have entered the door,
   But would like to run away. So for them, too,
   I stand by the door.

I admire the people who go way in.
   But I wish they would not forget how it was
Before they got in. Then they would be able to help
The people who have not yet even found the door,
   Or the people who want to run away again from God,
   You can go in too deeply, and stay in too long,
   And forget the people outside the door.
As for me, I shall take my old accustomed place,
Near enough to God to hear Him, and know He is there,
   But not so far from people as not to hear them,
   And remember they are there, too.
   Where? Outside the door--
   Thousands of them, millions of them.
   But--more important for me--
   One of them, two of them, ten of them,
Whose hands I am intended to put on the latch.
   So I shall stand by the door and wait
   For those who seek it.
"I had rather be a door-keeper ..."
   So I stand by the door.
Chapter 46

Observations on Ministry

In thinking about my great privilege of preaching God’s Word, while serving as a pastor, now for over forty-seven years, I have made some observations. To assume that I will share some “brand new, scintillating” truth for preachers and/or theologians is the height of foolish pride. But I may possibly share something that may give encouragement to a younger fellow-servant of Christ as he begins or continues to follow the Master’s lead.

There is no endeavor to give priority to these, so I’ll just mark them by bullets.

- “Our Master has never promised us success. He demands obedience. He expects faithfulness. Results are His concern, not ours. And our reputation is a matter of no consequence at all.” (Amy Carmichael, Gold Cord, p.37, S.P.C.K.)

- On family standards: We live and act a certain way, in our family, because we are Christians, not because I am a pastor.

- On adherence to standards: Remember the “pendulum principle” – we tend to be on one side or the other of the exact center. Therefore, I would rather err on the side of strictness, respecting myself; and err on the side of grace, respecting others.

- “An ounce of relationship weighs more than a ton of regulations.”

- The fastest way to an adult’s heart is through his children – recognize them, minister to them.

- Regarding the family: My family is more important than my ministry – Matthew 6:24 – sooner or later the two will compete for priority.

- "Delay is the deadliest form of denial." (Parkinson's Third Law)

- On complaining: “You can tell the whereabouts of a soldier by the nature of his complaints. The soldier safe in his
barracks complains about the food, bunkmates, and his
sergeant. The soldier on the front lines has only one
complaint…the enemy. (Rev. Peter Church, Crisis
Evangelism, p. 142)

- Insights from an Apostle … “Peter” (by Gerald Oosterveen,
  Tinley Park, Illinois)

  “Peter,
  had I
  followed Him as eagerly
  served Him as loyally
  loved Him as utterly
  agreed to die with Him as willingly
  as you,
  and then denied Him as dastardly,
  thrice,
  I too would weep when roosters crow.
  But
  because I have done all things conservatively
  and faced death not at all,
  I have neither wept
  nor been tenderly restored
  and called a rock.”

- Pastor Bernard Schneider gave me some very wise counsel
  one day: “Find two or three things God has uniquely enabled
  you to do well, and focus on them. Many other worthy,
  important things will claim your attention, but ‘keep the main
  thing the main thing.’” That meant that while I would do
  administration, evangelism, calling, writing and numerous
  other things, my primary focus would be on teaching and
  preaching God’s Word in the context of a loving, caring
  spirit. In reviewing my ministry, I am satisfied that his
  counsel was sound, and God chose to use me in that way.
MILEPOST #17

Future Steps
Chapter 48

Redirection #8

A common question that most pastors face is: “Should I move on ... and when?” That’s a tough one to answer. The children of Israel had it good, when they were in the wilderness. You see, God told them to follow the leading of the pillar of fire by night, and the pillar of cloud during the day. As long as the pillar remained on the tabernacle, they were to stay put. When the cloud lifted, they were to prepare to move. When it moved, they moved.

At the time I am writing these words, it appears that the “cloud may be lifting” for Janice and me.

Within the past two months there has been a confluence of plans in the families of all three of our sons: David has been planning, for some time, to move out of Alaska for the welfare of his family. Daniel has begun a two-year study program that will likely lead to a move elsewhere after that time expires. Now, son number three, Jonathan, is preparing to follow God’s leading into some form of mission ministry. This will likely mean moving away from the Kenai Peninsula.

These facts, coupled with a growing sense of readiness for retirement, are prompting Janice and me to consider what our next steps should be. We are experiencing some of the aches and pains that come with advancing age. The Psalmist alluded to this when he spoke of days of “labor and sorrow” that accompany the years of life after “threescore and ten.”

So we wait for the cloud to move. It will, in God’s own perfect timing. Meanwhile, as the wise man said: “Bloom where you’re planted.”
Chapter 49

The Unwritten Future

And what about the future? How will the story continue? When will it end? How many more mileposts are there yet to pass? Who will be the individuals whom God has planned to intersect my life for the purpose of continuing His work in me? I only know to relate an incident from my boyhood, which includes my earthly father, for it reflects the confidence I have in my heavenly Father regarding future steps.

When I was eleven, my friend Rufus Beazley came five miles to visit me one day. (Well, actually he came with his uncle.) We decided to ride horses over to his home. What a happy time we had. Then, as it happened, along toward evening, I started back home, riding one horse and leading the other. Bess (the one I was riding) was our old, slow, steady, plow horse, while Pinto was young and frisky.

Darkness fell as I traveled toward home. Pinto became impatient and began to pull at the reins with which I was leading her. Bess just … well, Bess was just Bess, plodding along. I began to feel so alone in the dark. What would happen to me? Would Pinto get away and become lost? Boy! What a mess I was in! And, there was still a lo-o-o-o ng way to go, at least three-quarters of a mile.

Suddenly, out of the darkness before me, there came a voice, “Is that you Charles?”

It was my father! Everything was all right now! I was not concerned about the dark, or Pinto, or anything, because my Dad was here, and he would take charge, and it would be all right. So we went home together.

And that is my anticipation for the future steps, as well. My Savior has promised to walk with me each step of the way. No path will be too dark, or rough, or dangerous, as long as He is there. And that He has promised. My steps and stops He knows all about, praise His name!

* * * *
“Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine. When thou walkest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee, when thou walkest through the fire, thou shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am thy God, the Holy One of Israel, the Savior…”

* * * *

“I walk with the King, hallelujah! I walk with the King, praise His name! No longer I roam, my soul faces home, I walk, and I talk with the King.”

* * * *

“Soli Deo Gloria”38
Visual Memories

Kaibara, Japan
1933

“Me ‘n my sister (Elsie)”

“Here I go…”
Age 3

Life on the farm
1937-45

1949 High School Graduation
(Uncle David’s suit, Dad’s shoes)

“A-pickin’ and a-grinnin’”
College days – 1949
“And there she stood…”

“Getting to know you…”

US Army
1954-56

“And she graduated, too” 1955

Navajo School Teacher
Counselor, NM – 1955-56
“And two shall be one”  
August 10, 1956

Seminary collateral reading  
1958

Ordination  
1965

The Thornton “8” sing  
1965

My, how they grow  
1967
New Lanham GBC
1972

“And here’s...Pastor T.”
1972

“Do you want a pilot?”
1974

Sunnyside, Washington
1981

David sees where Dad was baptized – Wesco, MO

Beloved daughter & sister died
December 11, 1981
Millersburg, Ohio
1987-96

Soldotna, Alaska
1996

Janice and Himself
2007

“Reading maketh a full man”

“Growing old together”
### ADDENDUM #1

Generations of Charles Gash Thornton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preceding</th>
<th>This</th>
<th>Next</th>
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</table>
| Samuel Watson Thornton (DD)  
b.1841 | | |
| Jesse Blackburn Thornton  
b. 1875 | | |
| Sarah Ann Jackson  
b.1842 | | |
| Benjamin Fletcher Thorpe | | |
| Eliza Williams Thorpe  
b. 1875 | | |
| Lydia Ann Henderson | | |
| | David Charles Thornton  
b.1957 |
| | | Daniel Earl Thornton  
b.1958 |
| | | Ruth |
| | | Alice  
| | Deborah Elaine Myers  
b. 1960 |
| | | Charles Gash Thornton  
b.1933 |
| | | Jonathan Evan Thornton  
b.1961 |
| | | Martha |
| | | Sam  
| | Rebekah Susan Jones  
b.1963 |
| | | John |
| | | Mary Elizabeth Thornton  
1964 – 1981 |
| | | Nancy |
| | | Susan |
| | | Mattie Elvina Bennett - 1867 |
| | | Mary Emma Bland  
b.1850 |
| | | Mary Scott Gash  
b. 1908 |
| | | Charles Herbert Gash - b. 1869 |
| | | Elizabeth Reed |
| | | Martha  
| | | Sam |
| | | Rebekah Susan Jones  
b.1963 |
| | | John |
| | | Mary Elizabeth Thornton  
1964 – 1981 |
| | | Nancy |
| | | Susan |
ADDENDUM #2
Generations of Janice Elaine (Baer) Thornton

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian Baer</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. 1833</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Baer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 7-8-1859</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catharina Mathias</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 1833</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion Baer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 1894 – d. 1936</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Pollock</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. 1839</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Della Pollock</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 1-3-1854</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha Garver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 1841</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice E. Baer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 1931</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Peter Lehnhart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 1815</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>John W. Lehnhart</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. 1857</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna Marie</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. 1829</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Lehnhart</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. 1896</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>John Jacob Remy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. 1832</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary A. Remy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. 1860</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johanna Maria Kocheiser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 1837</td>
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ADDENDUM #3

Intrepid Bear Hunters Three

_A poetic review of a bear hunt in which Tommy Chauvin, Dave and Chuck Thornton participated, September 19-21, 1997._

Way back in ’97, they say,
Three hunters worked with will.
A big black bear they vowed to catch
Out there on yonder hill.

Naught could dismay this trio brave,
With guns they were supplied.
Food for at least a week they took:
“Old bear, you’d better hide.”

It rained all day as they set out
To find that awful bear.
Their hands were freezing on their guns,
Frost nearly froze their hair.

Although they searched with all their might,
No bear could they espy.
Sad they went back to their camp
For darkness now was nigh.

A meal for hunters, most agree,
Is naught but dry and tough.
The meal that night (I dare to say)
Was tasty, sure enough.

Somehow Dave had found a way
To bring along some steak.
Fresh coffee truly added zest
When supper we did make.

A later snack was much enjoyed,
As cookies we did spy.  
The rain was raining all around,  
But we were warm and dry.

Now Tommy helped an awful lot.  
His truck had brought us there.  
When he and Chuck slept in the back,  
They really had no care.

For breakfast eggs came on the plate,  
With sausage right beside.  
Prepared, so off we went again.  
“Old Bear, you’d better hide.”

We sought him high; we sought him low,  
But “nary” a bear did spy.  
Our stomachs growled to let us know  
That lunchtime now was nigh.

So back we forced our aching feet,  
To shelter from the rain.  
Behold! A cabin we did find,  
And entrance we did gain.

We swept and cleaned and set up shop  
Within those cabin walls.  
No more to venture in the rain  
(Except for ‘nature’s calls’).

Chuck had to go awandering  
To find some H₂O.  
Just up the hill and in a dale  
A mountain stream did flow.

He washed the dishes without soap.  
(The sand it cleaned ‘real nice.’)  
When he returned the dishes all,  
His hands were chunks of ice.
The bear was safe out in the woods,
   The hunters snug and warm.
The rifles sat and gathered rust,
   And no one did they harm.

For supper, our chef Tommy made
   Shrimp salad, quite a bunch.
Our stomachs thought it had been years
   Since we had eaten lunch.

So once again we forced ourselves
   To stuff our ‘tummies’ full
Of dry and tasteless diet, which
   Is the old “hunter’s rule.”

With supper over, you can bet,
   We thought both long and hard.
Should we sleep in the cabin dry,
   Or outside in the yard?

The cabin ‘won,’ that we confess.
   (How weak we mortals be,
To sleep the night through snug and dry,
   Not wet beneath a tree.)

We broke up camp and went back home
   A little worse for wear.
So now we wait until next year
   To GO AND GET THAT BEAR.

Charles G. Thornton
ADDENDUM #4

The Christian Executive Ramrod

This is an extant copy of the explanation that accompanied the gifting of a Christian Executive Ramrod to Steve Siemens, the Chairman of the Iowa Sunday School Convention in 1986.

- Author -

Information on the origin, history, material, size, craftsmanship and use of the Christian Executive Ramrod (hereafter referred to as ‘CER’) has been carefully researched and compiled by Caleb Greenapple Trueblood, Professor of Nameology and Chairman of the Department of Hysterics at the University of Okoboji in Iowa. He also serves as Adjunct Professor of Ancient Guilds at LWSU (Lake Woebegone State University) in Minnesota.

- The Christian Executive Ramrod -

**Origin:** Careful research in both Biblical and historical areas reveals that, while Jacob certainly made use of a rod during his sheep-tending days, Moses (the first Chief Executive Officer of Israel) made extensive use of the CER. For example, his ‘rod to serpent to rod’ sign (used twice), rod over the Red Sea and rod to strike the rock for water, are instances when it appears evident that the CER was certainly a significant instrument in Moses’ hands. All credible researchers believe that Moses’ rod was the first of the CERs.

**History:** For the sake of brevity, we shall list only a few of the many historical instances of CERs in use.
1. In 2 Kings 6:6 it is highly likely that the stick used by Elisha to make the axe head swim was a CER.
2. During the middle ages, a slight variation of the CER was used in the canonizing of saints.
3. In early America, the circuit-riding preachers may well have used CERs with their muzzle loading rifles.
4. Many preachers’ children can attest to the adroit, effective way in which their fathers used the CER. This is a clear
application of the words found in the book of Proverbs: “He that spareth the rod hateth his son.” (To which we might add, that some sons came to a painful realization of the depths of their fathers’ love for them…frequently.)

5. Today, while its use is primarily ceremonial in nature, there are some very practical uses of the CER (see section – Use).

Material: While the CER might be made of most any type of wood, extensive research reveals that originally it was made from a specific tree found only on higher ground in the Holy Land. Due to the special use of the CER, even the cutting down of the tree, and its subsequent transportation to the guild workshops (see section – Craftsmanship) was done in highly ceremonialized manner, to the accompaniment of music. See 1 Samuel 10:5, where we read in part: “…thou shalt meet a company of priests coming down from the high place with ‘Psaltery’” (pronounced “P’-sul-tree’). It then refers to harps and other instruments used for the music part.

Size: While all CERs (with the exception of those used for canonizing saints) are pretty much the same length, there is a considerable difference in their diameter. For example, a .22 Caliber Ramrod indicates that its owner, while indeed an Executive, is none-the-less one of small caliber. If, however, the CER is a .50 Caliber (as this one is), it indicates that its owner is definitely a Big Bore.

Craftsmanship: Very seldom are we privileged to know so much about some of the ancient crafts as intensive research has revealed about the guild of CER craftsmen.

While they appear in the Old Testament, it isn’t until we get to the New Testament that we learn the name of this guild of extraordinarily gifted men. In Colossians 3:11 we read of the “Scythians.” These men were so named, originally, because of their great ability with a cutting instrument called a ‘scythe.’

Now the scythe was used for cutting hay or grain. (Which raises an interesting question: Were the reapers of Boaz actually Scythians? Perhaps some scholar will study this out for us.)
Through the years there developed two primary groups of cutters (or “scythers”):

1. Those who developed great skill in the cutting of wood and its subsequent refinement – see Joshua 9:21-27 for the “Hewers of wood” who were the first to actually function in guild form. It appears that the men who worked at the cutting of trees for Solomon’s Temple were doubtless Scythians also. (Perhaps a note here will help: Caleb Greenapple Trueblood and a number of his kin carry on this line of the guild in the form of whittling while rocking on their front porches.)

2. The Apostle Paul was doubtless a member of another branch of the Scythians. (Here a knowledge of Biblical languages is absolutely essential.) While the word “Scythian” has come to the New Testament intact, one of the tools used by the branch of the guild to which Paul belonged has had its name distorted through the intricacies and nuances of translation. To be brief, an indispensable tool of the tentmakers is a pair of scissors. We need reflect only briefly to discover that the original spelling of the name ‘scissors’ was ‘scyththors’ (note the same root as that of Scythian), but when the word came into English, the ‘thth’ portion was lost to the more easily pronounced ‘ss’ in scissors.

**Use:** The primary use of the CER is that of revealing office or position. Yet there are definitely practical uses as well:

1. The ‘pistol’ grip (not found on ordinary, small caliber CERs) is for ease in holding, pointing, or ‘jabbing.’

2. The spike-nailed tip (see optional accessories pack) is for use by the Executive in prodding reluctant boards into action.

3. The single feather tip is designed to awaken sleeping board members.

4. The multi-feathered tip is designed to dust off deceased board members.

5. Finally, since like old soldiers, CEOs never die, the plain tip is one that converts the CER into a handy cane for aid in walking in the later years.

Happy ramrodding, O greatly bored one.
ADDENDUM #5

Caleb’s Faith
Old Caleb started up the mount
when he was eighty-five.
Through forty years of wandering,
his faith was kept alive.
E'en though his enemies were huge –
their strongholds tough to take;
His faith in God's great faithfulness
did make the giants quake.

My Dad is now at eighty-five –
he, too, has Caleb's God.
He doesn't battle giants but,
like Caleb, he has trod
The path of faithfulness, which leads
through pastures green or rough.
Just waiting for the Father's call:
"Come home, my son. Enough!"

Oh, Father, help me walk in faith
the path you have for me.
Like Caleb's faith, or my Dad's too,
may mine shine bright for Thee.
My children want to see a faith
that proves that God is ample.
Through good or ill, like my Dad's faith,
Lord please make mine a sample.

Charles Thornton
10-6-1988
ADDENDUM #6

Me ‘n God ‘n Porch-Settin’

Now me ‘n God was settin’ on
The porch the other day.
He’s so relaxed, I’m so uptight,
I don’t know what to say.

He sez: “Now son, what’s eatin’ you?
My peace you sure ain’t got.
I mind I promised long ago
That peace would be your lot.”

“Lord, ain’t you shook (at least a bit)?
Ol’ Satan’s on a tear.
He’s swallerin’ all the good folks up,
‘N that gives me a scare.

Why in our church he’s got some folks
A-thinkin’ they’re the Lord.
A guy is in an awful mess
Who goes against their word.

“Take Pastor, now, the other day
He almost sold his house,
‘N moved away, ‘n quit the church.
Because of such a louse.

“The devil’s workin’ hard, you know;
His helpers sure are tough.
I’m most afraid he’ll win the fight
‘N stomp us sure enough.

“I’m such a puny, little guy,
‘N Satan sure is large.”

God smiled - and rocked - and said to me:
“My son, I’m still in charge.”

Caleb - with some help from
Diotrephes (3 John) and David (Psalm 2:4)
10-24-1990
ADDENDUM #7

Dear Rebekah,

The ripe age of thirty, for some, is quite droll;
They need something fresh to put warmth in their soul.
For you, my dear daughter (just as for my wife),
There’s no need to add something new to your life...
But here is a fife!

No slides and no valves and no reeds or mouth pieces
(Those things that get lost by your nephews and nieces).
No, just a short tube with some holes for your fingers,
Plus one other hole for your breath (while it lingers).
It’s not just for “singers.”

In old Williamsburg did I buy it one day.
I thought to myself: “Self, here’s something to play.”
A maestro of music you’ll be, you can bet.
So practice each day, see how good you can get
(Said the cat: “You’re all wet.”).

So, daughter of mine, now I give it to you.
Why not give a try to see what you can do?
This birthday’s a great time for you to begin
To play with enjoyment (at least with a grin)...
I’m sure it’s no sin.

Have a happy birthday, Rebekah.
Love, your Dad
1-8-1983
ADDENDUM #8

The Angels Bow

1 - The angels bow in wonder at Thy throne
The seraphim in awe Thy glories own
While Gabriel leads in song the great angelic bands
I gaze in love at Jesus’ nail-pierced hands.

2 - Rainbows surround the throne of Thy great might
Earth’s sovereigns cast their crowns down in Thy sight
E’en Satan and his hosts of demons bow in fear
But Jesus’ thorn-crowned brow I will hold dear.

Chorus - The hole in Jesus’ side is there for me
The stripes upon His back have set me free
Forsaken by His Father on the tree
This holy Son of God gave life to me

3 - O fill the vault of heaven with God’s praise
All creatures of the earth, your anthems raise
Join in, all you unnumbered galaxies of space
Just let me gaze upon my Savior’s face

4 - Let all creation share tumultuous joy
You heav’nly creatures all your means employ
In holy praise and wonder worship Him above
I look at Jesus’ sacrifice of love

Charles Thornton
Endnotes

1 Ephesians 6:6
2 2 Chronicles 8:4
3 Robert Louis Stevenson, Treasure Island
4 Zane Gray, The Last Trail
5 Zane Gray, The Spirit of the Border
6 John 3:9
7 A cow made famous by the Chicago fire
8 “Sweet Little Jesus Boy,” by Robert MacGimsey
9 “Living for Jesus,” by Thomas O. Chisholm
10 Hebrews 13:2
11 Charles Thornton, One in Seven Thousand, p. 8
12 1 Corinthians 14:9, 11, 13
13 James 5:12
14 Philippians 4:19
15 Proverbs 13:12
16 Other nicknames in that community were names such as Pot, Bo, and Boo.
17 Walter Martin had written The Kingdom of the Cults
18 Robert D. Culver, Daniel and the Latter Days (1954)
19 Philippians 4:19
20 1 Kings 17:9
21 1 Kings 17:4
22 Psalm 37:23
23 Mark 6:31
24 Frank Cook, Love, Acceptance and Forgiveness
25 Psalm 150:2: “Praise Him for His mighty works…”
26 Psalm 23:4
27 Proverbs 31:28
28 Psalm 133:1
29 1 Corinthians 11:1
30 Marriage Savers: Helping Your Family and Friends Avoid Divorce, by Michael McManus
31 Ecclesiastes 10:10
32 2 Timothy 2:15
33 Ecclesiastes 12:12
34 2 Timothy 2:15
35 Proverbs 17:22
36 Numbers 9:17
37 Psalm 90:10
38 The concluding notation in each piece of George Friedrich Handel’s music.