

Shining the Light

THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF
J. Allen Blair

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Dedication

To my loving family:
Elva, my faithful wife for 63 years,
three caring daughters
with their dedicated husbands,
nine devoted grandchildren,
and four great-grandchildren.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Over the years, Matthew 5:16 has been a daily challenge to me. Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* I have tried to shine my light in my walk and in my ministry for many years. Although I have failed the Lord at times, the Lord has never failed me.

I have sought to shine the light of Christ in our home, in the churches I served, and everywhere I went. While I was in the traveling ministry, I tried to shine my light from east to west and from north to south, in the United States as well as in other countries.

Through radio, I found the greatest privilege of all to shine my light. God has blessed this marvelous opportunity in a remarkable way. I give Him all the praise for the strength and help He gave all along the journey as I tried to shine the light and do His will.

Each night, after I have had a talk with the Lord, I get in bed, close my eyes, and quote the 23rd Psalm. What a marvelous message it has for everyone! The words of the first verse are es-

pecially meaningful to me: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." I thank the Lord because that is so true.

The rest of the Psalm continues to bless my heart as I rest in the Lord and go to sleep. God is so good!

—J. Allen Blair

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Chapter One

The Early Years

1913–1925

It was a stormy night on August 10, 1913, when I made my entry into the world at the Atlantic City Hospital. My parents, Rena and George Blair, were elated to have a son. Dad was a policeman and Mother was a homemaker.

They named me Joseph Allen Blair in honor of my grandfather, Joe Allen, whose birthday was also on August 10. He was a dealer in fish, oysters, and clams, and he spent his summers in Atlantic City running fishing trips to Great Bay in his large cabin cruiser. He owned a successful fish market in Philadelphia, where he spent most of his time.

My dad was born the youngest child in a family of eight children in Clinton, North Carolina. His mother died early in life and his father married again. The children found the stepmother difficult to live with, so several of them left home, including my dad. He joined the United States Navy and later married my mother.

My mother's mother died at a young age with tuberculosis. Her father made provision for

Mother and her brother to be reared by an aunt and uncle, Ella and Caleb Mathis, in New Gretna, New Jersey. Both were Christians and did a wonderful job in rearing the children. Some years later, Mother's father married his second wife, Reba, who was a delightful woman.

Our family lived in a large rental home near the inlet section of Atlantic City. My parents were respectable people, but they had little knowledge of spiritual values. In fact, during my 21 years in the home, I never saw the Bible opened or heard a word of prayer. Mother was a perfectionist and a fastidious housekeeper. I found that hard at times, as a little kid growing up, though I did learn some valuable lessons that I have never forgotten.

When I was old enough, I enjoyed going to school. Since I didn't have any brothers or sisters to play with at home, it was always fun to be with the other kids in the neighborhood.

Aside from school, I spent a lot of time with my friend Arthur. One Christmas he received two pairs of boxing gloves. We decided to plan a boxing match and made a large sign that read:

BIG FIGHT

KID FREER AND BATTLING BLAIR

2:00 P.M.—IN THE CELLAR—THIS SATURDAY

BRING ALL YOUR FRIENDS!

We placed the sign on the front steps of my home. Arthur and I thought we had done a good job of keeping the sign out of my mother's sight,

because my parents always went in and out the back door. But I got a surprise when my mother came out to sweep the front porch! Another kind of fight began and I lost—with pain. Needless to say, the fight between Arthur and me had to be canceled.

As a policeman, my father was fortunate to have his beat near our home, which he walked every hour on his 8-hour shift. I considered it special to walk with the big man in the blue coat and brass buttons whenever he let me. On his usual route, we always passed Higgins Original Salt Water Taffy Store, where we stopped and bought peanut butter salt water taffy to eat along the way. It was really good and a special treat for me.

I attended Madison Avenue School from kindergarten through third grade. For the fourth grade, it was necessary for me to move to the Massachusetts Avenue School, where I continued through the sixth grade. There was a special benefit in being at that school because it was on Dad's beat. He directed traffic there with a stop-and-go sign on busy Atlantic Avenue so the children could cross the street safely.

I was always proud to stand in the middle of the street with Dad, who was loved by all the children. During the lunch hour, he would often give me the privilege of turning the sign, which I enjoyed.

My father and I did lots of fun things to-

gether. He would take me places, and we had some very good times. He always took me to the big three-ring circus when it came to town. I have never forgotten the day he bought me a live lizard on a string, which the man pinned to my shirt. Later at home, the lizard ran around all through our house. We had a hard time keeping tabs on him.

I always looked forward to summertime when Dad was on vacation. One summer he took me and several of his police friends with him on a 2-week fishing trip. After the first week, he brought me home. Maybe I was too much of a responsibility to have around for 2 weeks, as it seemed I got into all kinds of trouble.

One time, while fishing, I tried to cast my line the way I saw the men doing. But instead of going into the sea, my hook snagged my right ear lobe! Dad cut the hook and was able to save my ear from being the “catch of the day.”

Another time I got in our little extra rowboat and decided to take a ride. It was easy to row with the tide—but when I tried to return, it was impossible. I rowed to the bank and clung to the tall grass until Dad came looking for me in his motorboat and towed me in. He was pretty upset with me.

We stayed in my grandfather's fishing shack on a tiny island called Hoffman's Point. Inside was one big room, which served as the kitchen, dining area, and bedroom. We all slept

on army cots, and at night we could hear the big rats running around in the walls. It was very scary for me. I will never forget those weeks. I loved everything about them—except the rats!

During my early years, my mother spent quality time with me. Often she would read to me. When I started school, she was there to help with my homework when I needed help. She was a strong disciplinarian and tried to keep me in line, which wasn't always easy for her. When there was punishing to be done, she usually did it. Dad rarely punished me—though sometimes he should have.

In those childhood years, I had another young friend, Jack, who lived next-door to us in his summer home. Jack's mother was a widow; and she, her mother, and Jack came to Atlantic City for the summer to escape the sweltering heat of Philadelphia, where they lived the rest of the year. They enjoyed the seashore and looked forward to their annual visit.

Jack's mother was quite wealthy, and she gave her son just about every kind of toy imaginable. You can be sure that I spent much time in Jack's home playing with all his toys. The one thing I enjoyed most was his small, two-seater, self-propelled automobile that would go as fast as the driver could pump the pedals. Although I had seen similar miniature cars, Jack's was the Cadillac of all toy automobiles! He was very generous with his toys, and I spent many hours rid-

ing his automobile around the block. Our family was not well-off financially, so Jack's friendship and his toys were a special treat for me.

After spending my early years in our large rental home, my parents purchased a much smaller home several blocks away. I was about 9 years old and I soon found several new friends. Next-door to us lived an electrician with his wife and two young sons, Harry and Bill. The boys and I had some really enjoyable times together. Of course, we had our usual disagreements as young boys, but things would always get patched up and the friendships continued.

One day, when I was about 10, Harry invited me to go out in his little rowboat and take a swim. I had a severe cold and my mother would not let me go. But I got my trunks, tucked them under my shirt, and went with him anyway. After getting in the boat, we rowed for about a half-hour to the big inlet. The tide was flowing rapidly out of the inlet to the ocean. About a quarter of a mile from shore Harry said, "I'm going to dive in and take a little swim. You stay in the boat and hold the oars to keep us from drifting with the tide."

Harry enjoyed himself for what I thought was a long time. So, seeing no danger and not understanding tides, I dove in and swam out to him. I was just learning to swim, so about 25 yards was my limit. When he saw me, he yelled, "I thought I told you to wait in the boat. Look at

the boat!" The boat was drifting toward the ocean with the outgoing tide. Our only hope was to swim toward a small sandbar, about a quarter of a mile away, visible only at low tide. I was really scared, because of my inability to swim very well. But Harry assured me that we could make it.

We drifted with the tide, but at the same time we tried to swim toward the shore. Harry was a good swimmer and stayed by my side, encouraging me all along the way. When I was out of breath, I turned over on my back and floated until I could breathe normally, then we swam some more. Finally, we reached the sandbar. I tried to walk but fell exhausted. Fortunately, the boat ran ashore farther down on the sandbar. We retrieved it and rowed back to shore. Tired and thankful, we finally managed to get home.

Even though I was not a Christian at the time, I am sure the Lord sustained me. I learned a lesson that day that I have never forgotten. After that experience, whenever my mother told me not to do something, I tried to obey. I almost drowned that day because of my selfish disobedience.

Later, after I had become a Christian, this experience came to mind many times, and it reminded me of the importance of obeying God and His Word. I soon learned from my study of the Scriptures that the Lord places a high value on obedience to His holy will. We can take a lesson from this statement from Samuel when he

confronted Saul: "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22).

After finishing the sixth grade, I went to the Junior High School, which was quite a distance from home. There I came in contact with older children who had no spiritual training. And because I had no relationship with the Lord, it wasn't long till I was influenced by the wrong companions.

The world with its lusts and wrong interests soon became more and more attractive to me. My mother kept pretty strong tabs on me and continued to stress good morals, but the worldly influence seemed more appealing.

Chapter Two

The Teenager

1925–1932

About the time I entered high school, things were disintegrating in our family. Mother and Dad argued frequently, often at mealtimes, usually about money. In addition to the economic depression of the time, much of the scarcity of money in our family could be blamed on Dad. He had always been an occasional drinker, but now he was drinking more often.

Dad no longer had the interest in me that he once had, and he let me go on my own and do as I pleased. I felt the effects of the lack of love and interest, and I spent much more time out of the home with my fun-loving friends.

One morning, shortly after Dad left for work, he was brought home drunk, stripped of his badge, and fired from the police force after 15 years of service. He had been found intoxicated on the job.

It was now obvious that Dad had become an alcoholic. It seemed the more he and Mother argued, the worse things became. Dad was both verbally and physically abusive when he was

drunk. His profanity and the battering of Mother was almost uncontrollable at times. No longer was he the kind and affable man I knew when I was a child. Alcohol was ruining his life.

Before I was saved, I ran with worldly companions, some of whom drank. But after seeing what alcohol had done to my father, I vowed never to touch the stuff, and I never have.

As I look back, I realize that my parental home was like many thousands of homes today—without God and His Word, which is a sure road to unhappiness. Only Christ in the hearts of each family member can make our homes the havens of joy and blessing God intended them to be.

Soon I lost all respect for my father, and I did what I could to help Mother. Disgusted with everything at home, Mother began to have other male interests. I was left to go my own way, which unfortunately I did.

In addition to my schoolwork, I had to work long hours to earn money for the home. I wanted to quit school and get a fulltime job but Mother would not allow it, for which I have always been grateful.

As conditions continued to get worse all through my 4 years of high school, I tried to make the best of things by seeking fun and entertainment outside my home. I played football in high school and ran with a lively crowd rather than with the kids who wanted to achieve.

After Dad was fired from the police department, he became a carpenter. This did not help his alcohol problem. He had always been handy with tools, and he could have made a success of his new venture if it had not been for his drinking habit.

In his new occupation, Dad would give a prospective customer an estimate for a job, and if he got the job he would claim that he needed the money up front for lumber and hardware. Then, after receiving the money, off he would go on another binge, which lasted until all the money was spent. The customer would call our home inquiring about the carpenter. Mother would lie and say that he was sick or out of town. This lasted all through my junior high and high school years as things at home continued to worsen.

In high school, I soon found new friends, though they were not always the best kind. But not knowing the Lord myself and with no spiritual training, I was like putty in the hands of the devil. A classmate at school, Bill Jewel, became a good friend. We went to a lot of places together with no more interest in life than to have fun and a good time.

One morning, in the midst of all my disappointments, I had a pleasant surprise. I found a stray dog sleeping on our back porch. After feeding and befriending him, I knew I had gained a loyal companion. Usually, anywhere I went, my

friend Brownie was sure to follow unless I made him stay at home.

Sensing the time I arrived home from school each day, Brownie would scratch on the door and whine. As soon as Mother let him out, he would run to the corner of our street and sit and wait until I appeared. I could be a block away, and when he heard my whistle he would run to me and jump all over me. Brownie wasn't much of a dog to look at, but to me he was very special.

Brownie slept on our back porch at night, and in the morning he was always there to give me a hearty greeting. One Friday morning, however, when I went out he wasn't there. Immediately I made a hasty search of the surrounding area, but with no success. As soon as I returned from school that afternoon, I jumped on my bicycle again and scoured the neighborhood, whistling and calling. But there was no Brownie to be found. As the next day was Saturday, I got up early, got on my bicycle, and started out on an extended search.

After pedaling my bike for several miles, I spotted some dogs playing in the middle of the street several blocks from where I was. One of them looked like Brownie. As I rode toward him, I whistled and I saw his ears go up. Then he took off and dashed my way. What a happy reunion that was! He jumped up and down so furiously, I could hardly get a hold of him. Finally, I

grabbed him and pulled him up on my bike and pedaled home as fast as I could go.

Regrettably, my companionship with Brownie was short-lived. He had a bad habit I was unable to break. He loved to chase cars. One Sunday afternoon, my folks sent me to get some ice cream. Brownie was with me. We rarely ever used a leash back then. I started to go across the street. A car was coming. Brownie dashed out after it. What he didn't see was a car coming the other way. The car hit him and ran over him.

I felt crushed as I looked at him. He just lay there and appeared to be dead. He was bleeding from his mouth and I was scared to go near him. The driver got out of the car and asked, "Is that your dog?" I said, "Yeah." He carefully picked him up and carried him home for me. He laid him down gently in his box and went on his way.

Brownie finally awakened and got up, but one leg went in all directions. I could see that it was broken. Aside from that, he seemed to be pretty good. We took him to the veterinarian and he set the leg. But he said, "Your dog may have internal injuries."

The next morning Brownie was sitting up but appeared to be very weak. I went on to school. Brownie died that day, and my mother had him taken away rather than have me see the dead dog there when I came home. That was a

tough blow for me. I surely missed that little dog and lost my best friend.

To help my mother keep food on the table, I worked at various jobs after school, as well as on Saturdays and in the summertime. I did all kinds of work—on a fruit truck, a laundry truck, in an ice cream store, as a messenger for Western Union, and numerous other jobs. The pay was not very good, but in our circumstances every little bit helped.

While a sophomore in high school, I went to the school placement bureau and applied for work. Shortly afterward, they found a job for me in a large, fashionable restaurant on the Boardwalk. After school I hastened over and met with the manager. I answered his questions and he hired me for Sundays from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The job consisted of standing beside the massive entrance and watching that no customers slipped out without paying their bill. The pay was only \$5.00 for the day but the extras were good. I was told I could go to any table and order breakfast, lunch, and supper and then simply sign the bill for the waitress. It was an easy job, although it was very tiresome standing all day long.

My first Sunday on the job was a bonanza. I had three sumptuous meals. Being a hungry teenager, I suppose I felt that my appetite should be satisfied—and it was all free. But the picnic was soon over. The following week the

manager phoned my mother and said, "I am very sorry to tell you, Mrs. Blair, but we cannot use your son anymore. He ate too much!"

Later, I got another job on the Boardwalk at the popular Kours Frozen Custard Store. My job consisted of carrying the heavy cans of custard from the back room down a long hall to the freezer. After doing this for 12 hours, I was completely exhausted, and for all that work I got only a couple of dollars pay. I quit that job in a hurry.

I finally got a job working for the American Stores Company, which was a large food chain. I worked every day after school and all day on Saturday. I got \$5.00 a week and turned it over to my mother. In turn, she gave me a quarter for spending money.

In our neighborhood was a popular ice cream store where many of the high school kids would often hang out. When I was there one day, one of the waitresses told me about a girl who said she wanted to meet me. She went on to give a rather elaborate description of the girl, which made me very curious.

The waitress said that in order to meet the girl I would have to go to the First Methodist Church. "Go anytime," she said, "for she is always there." This sounded very interesting. Being somewhat shy around girls, I got my friend Charlie Sears to go with me to the Methodist Church one Sunday evening. That was a mistake, because after Charlie met her

he got interested in her too, for she was very attractive.

We didn't get much out of the sermon that Sunday night—we were too busy surveying the audience. After a while, I spotted a pretty young girl sitting down in front with a boy. I told Charlie and he responded with, "I know that boy! His name is Butch. I play basketball with him down at the 'Y.'"

After the service, Charlie introduced me to the boy and found that he was the girl's brother. Everything the waitress had told me was very true. Elva was beautiful. After we had visited awhile, she and her brother Butch invited us to their home. It was a very enjoyable evening. Elva asked me if I would like to dance. I had never danced in my life! But not wanting to be a disappointment, I jumped at the opportunity. I was surprised that she would ever see me again after that calamity.

We had a few dates after that evening, but I soon decided that she wasn't the girl for me. She was too good with her high moral standards and regular church attendance. That certainly did not fit my lifestyle. I preferred someone less religious who identified with my way of life. Because of my selfishness and immoral ways, I was sure that Elva and I just couldn't get along. Thus, our promising romance came to an end.

In my junior year, however, after passing Elva in school many times, and being a little

more mature, I thought I would give it another try. We dated again. It seemed to work out much better than before. In fact, we went steady for several years. I had to make a few concessions, however, one of which was attending church at least once every Sunday. We usually went to the evening service, because I chose to be down at the beach all day Sunday.

Our relationship was not always a good one. I admired her lifestyle and respected her high standards, but I wasn't interested in making them mine. I still liked my kind of good times.

About a year after high school, things were getting worse instead of better, so I broke up with Elva. Again I started running around with my buddies and other girls, as I lived for myself and my sinful choices. With wretched conditions at home, having lost my dog, and now breaking up my relationship with a wonderful girl, I was becoming disgusted with life. It just seemed that nothing worked out. The free and loose life I was living was far from satisfying. I knew there had to be something better, but I surely couldn't find what it was.

When I was in high school, I tried to make the best of my unhappy home situation by being involved in good times and sports. My grades were not the best because I did not apply myself. I had little interest in school and I hoped to get out as soon as possible and begin to make money. All in all, my teenage years

were most miserable. I have said many times that I would never want to repeat those years. The only enjoyment I had overall was with a few of my close friends. I spent much of my time going here and there with them and living for the carnal pleasures.

Chapter Three

The Change

1932-1935

More and more, life to me was appearing to be a huge disappointment. With no better objective than catering to my own selfish interests, I was finding life out in the world to be extremely unsatisfying. But because I knew of nothing better, I could only hope for a brighter day.

When I was in high school, Bill Jewel was a special friend to me. Even after high school we spent a lot of time together. Usually on Saturday evenings we would go to the Steel Pier or Convention Hall, pick up a couple of girls, and dance the night away with one of the big bands.

Even though I was not a Christian when I was going with Elva, looking back now I can see how God was at work in my life in various ways. From the very beginning when I almost drowned, He preserved me, which tells me He had a purpose for my life. I had none, but He did.

Another occasion was the Sunday night Elva and I attended a church where we had never been before. It was storming very hard that night. As we often did when we visited a new church, we in-

tended to sit in the back. But when we entered the small church, it was crammed full. We were ushered to the only two remaining seats in the front row. A visiting evangelist was the speaker, and it seemed that every time he made a forceful point he would look straight at me. This made me very uncomfortable. I was perspiring and shifting around in my seat, wishing I could get out of there.

At the close of his message the speaker gave an invitation. After a while, since there was no response, he came down from the platform, took hold of my arm, and said quietly, "Young man, would you like to come to Christ tonight?" Embarrassed, I became angry and yanked my arm away, saying, "No!" What I did not realize until later was that it was actually the Lord working through the evangelist when he took hold of my arm and invited me to Christ. But because of my pride and self-centeredness, I had missed a wonderful opportunity to meet the Savior right then and there.

After taking Elva to her home, I went on to mine. I was surprised when Mother met me at the door and asked, "Did you hear the news?" I responded with "What news?" She replied, "Bill was drowned tonight." (Not Bill Jewell but another boy named Bill who lived next to us.) He was about 20 years of age and loved the water and boats. As soon as he finished high school, he joined the Coast Guard.

Mother said Bill was on duty that stormy

Sunday night, when word came that a craft was in distress out at sea. The small Coast Guard cutter with the captain and two men responded. But on the way out, it was swamped by a huge wave. The cutter overturned and sank. Bill and the two other men began swimming the several miles in the stormy ocean toward the Steel Pier. Two of them made it, but Bill did not.

I couldn't sleep all that night thinking of what had happened—the evangelist inviting me to come to Christ, and then the news of Bill's death. Both events disturbed me without let-up. I asked myself, "Where is Bill now?" I thought of my own experience of almost drowning. I had made it to shore—but now Bill drowned. I had no answers. I was more confused than ever.

Some time earlier, when I was dating Elva, I was quite impressed by her mother, who was unusually kind and caring. She took me aside one evening and said, "Allen, I have a little book I would like to give you to read, if you will promise to read a chapter a day." I responded with, "What is the book?" She replied, "Never mind what the book is. Will you read a chapter a day?" Wanting to please her, I said, "Sure." She handed me the little book. I looked at the cover and saw the words, "New Testament." What a surprise! I didn't expect that.

Nevertheless, I kept my word and read a chapter each day. Frankly, I didn't get much out of it because I didn't put much into it. Often, I

simply read the words while my mind was wandering miles away.

When Elva and I were seniors in high school, 3 months before graduation, we spent an entire Saturday looking for jobs and filling out applications. With the Great Depression in full swing, job prospects were few in number. Again, in spite of my hard heart, God was at work. On the afternoon of the day I graduated from high school, I received a phone call from a gentleman in the Atlantic City Electric Company, offering me a job. I went to work the next morning and never missed a day of employment, in spite of the depression. At the time, I attributed this to good luck, but later I realized it was the continual working of the hand of the Lord.

Several weeks later, Elva received a call and was asked to work for the local trolley company. Here were two definite miracles, for out of our graduating class of more than three hundred students, only a few got jobs. God had a plan for our lives and it was being fulfilled.

I did well at the Electric Company, getting several advancements and salary increases. In fact, I even opened a savings account and was able to deposit a dollar or so each week. But then I was faced with another disappointment. One morning when I picked up the paper, I saw the large headline: ALL BANKS CLOSED. I read on and discovered that because of the failing economy all the banks were closed *permanently*. I

lost my \$25 and wondered how life could get any worse.

Adding to my uncertain feeling, when I was at the Electric Company, there was a young fellow who told me he was a Christian, yet he never witnessed to me. He just said he was a Christian and was going to leave the company and go into the ministry. I thought, *Poor guy*. He was a nice-looking fellow too. But he was always talking about going into the ministry. Five years later when I left the company, he was still saying he was going into the ministry. He never got there. The ministry for him was the same as it is for many people—always in the “future tense.”

On New Year's Eve 1934, one year after I had broken off with Elva, my friend Bill Jewel and I planned a gala evening with a couple of “blind dates” to celebrate the entrance of the New Year. But at 7:30 Bill phoned and said, “It's all off. The girls canceled out.”

I was quite disturbed, to say the least. There I was, 20 years old and stuck at home on New Year's Eve. I was really disgusted with life and everything in it. After a while I got over my anger, and I decided I might just as well go to bed early and feel good the next day.

Then, remembering to read my chapter from the New Testament, I picked up the little book and began to read the chapter for that day: John's gospel, chapter 3, about the New Birth. Because I was disappointed and somewhat de-

pressed, I read slowly and thoughtfully, hoping to find something encouraging.

I found it all right! As I read, the words took hold of me as never before. I read the chapter a second time, which I had never done. As I read, I was deeply convicted about my lifestyle. Realizing I needed something better than I had known, I knelt by my bedside and told the Lord I wanted to be “born again.” I didn’t understand it all but I had to do it. I couldn’t restrain myself. It seemed as if the whole room was full of conviction for my sins.

What joy and delight came into my life that night! There was an immediate change in my outlook. No longer did I want the old crowd and the ways of the world. I had an earnest desire to live for the Lord.

After my life was completely changed, I began to appreciate Elva more than ever. I thought of her purity and love for the Lord along with her desire to do the things that honored Him. Now I knew I had been wrong and she was right.

Several days later I called Elva, told her what I had done, and asked for a date. I assured her that things would be different now that I was different. She was happy for my decision but said she was busy. I called back several times but she always replied the same, “I am busy.” I learned later that she had doubts about the reality of my change.

Although I was disappointed, I was not

willing to give up. I prayed much and the Lord gave me a good idea. I called Elva's mother one night and told her that I had turned my life over to Christ after reading the "little book." It was about 7:00 p.m. and she said enthusiastically, "Come on around and tell me all about it." I rushed over to her house. We had a wonderful evening together as we talked about the Lord.

Finally, after several hours, I told her I'd like to get back with her daughter. She said, "Don't worry, we'll work that out, somehow." Nothing could be better than having my potential mother-in-law on my side! After several months, it finally did work out. Elva and I began dating again and soon we were serving the Lord together. What a delight it was! How different our new relationship was now that Christ was in control.

I was amazed at the miraculous change that came into my life as the result of believing on Christ. No longer did I want to follow in my old sinful ways at the parties and dances as in the past. God took the desire away completely. Later, the Lord gave me the courage to go to each of my old friends and share what Christ had done for me. They couldn't believe that it was real. I assured them that it was and I could no longer continue in my old way of life. They concluded that since I now had "religion" I had gone out of my mind.

I shared Christ with some of the people in our office. The news got around fast: "Blair has

gone nuts—he has religion.” They called me “Deacon” and “Preacher.” Some of these people were church members, but they used profanity and told dirty jokes just as the unchurched people did. But when sorrow or difficulties entered their lives, they came to me requesting prayer. Although they would not live for Christ themselves, they knew where to go in time of need.

As time went on, Elva and I had a continuing burden to serve the Lord. We formed a Gospel team with some other young people. We didn’t know much about the Bible, but we made up for it by our zeal for the Lord. We went to churches, rescue missions, anywhere we could get an opportunity to witness for the Lord. We had regular street meetings and were reaching other young people for Christ. We didn’t know much, but we knew for sure that Jesus could save anyone who came to Him, and we were going about sharing this precious truth.

The Christian Business Men in Atlantic City had a platform erected on the Boardwalk, where thousands and thousands of people would mill up and down every evening with nothing to do and no place to go. The men witnessed there from 9:00 p.m. until 12:00 every night. They asked us to give our testimonies many times.

God gave us an increasing number of opportunities to share Jesus Christ. I found the new life in Christ to be a wonderful life, such as I had never imagined.

Chapter Four

The Goal

1933–1935

When I came to Christ, He gave me not only a new life but also a goal to live for: “That I might obey Him and make Him known.”

I contacted my friends and told them about my new life in Christ. I went on street meetings, to the rescue missions, Boardwalk meetings, churches, anywhere I was privileged to tell what the Lord had done for me. I was so grateful for new life in Christ that I couldn’t keep quiet about God’s wonderful plan of salvation.

I could hardly believe I was doing this. For years I had been an introvert, afraid to talk to people. In high school I played football, thinking that might help my shyness. I ran in two marathons, one in Atlantic City and one in Philadelphia, but nothing seemed to help—until I received Christ. I can certainly identify with David, who said, “I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (Psalm 34:4).

Having my spiritual needs satisfied, I also felt I should do something about my physical

needs. Being a skinny kid, 6 feet tall and weighing only 155 pounds, I got into weight lifting and wrestling, as well as systematic exercise, good training habits, and prayer. I gained 50 pounds and became much stronger my first year.

Mark Berry of Philadelphia, the editor of *Strength and Health* magazine, heard of my success in building up my body and arranged for pictures and a story for his magazine. The response was encouraging. Letters came from young men all across the country who were struggling to gain weight. It was a delight not only to share with them the details of my physical success but also to tell them about Christ, who made it all possible.

While I was doing my weight-lifting training at the local YMCA, I met Mr. Paul Wolcott, the Director, who became for me a most valued Christian friend. He invited me to attend the annual YMCA fund-raising dinner, which was held in one of the large hotels. He wanted me to tell about my conversion as well as my physical achievement. What an opportunity this was to talk about Christ! Civic leaders, doctors, lawyers, politicians, and many other professional people were present at this black-tie event. God blessed in a marvelous way and the Holy Spirit gave me great liberty to tell of God's provision in my life.

Elva was a member of the Chelsea Presbyterian Church, and I joined there as well. At that church the Lord brought into my life a

Christian gentleman by the name of Henry Fiedler. He was the Vice President of the prestigious Boardwalk National Bank of Atlantic City. Mr. Fiedler was a quiet, unassuming person, but he had an outgoing personality and an interest in people. Indeed, he was God's man for me at this time. Experienced in Christian service and unusually knowledgeable in the Scriptures, he took a particular interest in Elva and me, inviting us to his home to instruct and encourage us in things of the Lord. He had in his study one of the finest Christian libraries I have ever seen.

Mr. Fiedler was also our Sunday school superintendent, and after making certain we were well established in the fundamentals of the faith he offered me a Sunday school class of eight Junior boys, which I found to be a most useful contribution to my Christian growth. I not only taught the boys, but they taught me many things as well.

Some months later when Mr. Fiedler's term as superintendent expired, he chose to step down and he nominated me to replace him. I was elected and Mr. Fiedler stayed by my side all the way and led me along. This responsibility meant much to me in my service for the Lord.

One night a week, several godly pastors taught Christian study courses in our local YWCA. The YWCA in Atlantic City was definitely a Christian "Y" in every sense of the word. Elva and I enrolled in several classes and found the

teaching highly worthwhile. As we browsed in the bookstore one evening, I found a small box of about 200 Scripture memory cards. I purchased the cards, and I gradually committed to memory many Bible verses as I walked to and from work. This was not only stimulating but especially useful in my Christian service. I have continued the practice of memorizing and reviewing Scripture daily for many years, and I would suppose that I now have a file of about two thousand verses. I am convinced that this is one of the most productive ways I have ever found to get a thorough grasp on the Word of God.

Things had not improved at our home. In fact, the situation had gotten much worse. But with the love of God in my heart I could handle it much better than before I was saved. I witnessed to Mother and Dad many times, but though they both professed to believe in Christ I saw no change in either of them. People have asked me, "Do you think your parents were saved?" My answer has always been the same: "I don't know, but I surely hope so." I wish I had more to go on than that.

On Christmas Eve 1934, Elva and I announced our engagement and our plans to be married in the Fall of 1935. But as time passed, we realized that the Lord had other plans. In the midst of all our busy activity for the Lord, I had an increasing burden to serve Him fulltime. This being the case, I knew I needed to get more train-

ing. When I told Elva my thoughts, her response was, "I will never stand in your way."

There were three dedicated young women in our church who were employed by the local YWCA. Their lives and service for the Lord impressed us most favorably. Later, we learned that each of them had been graduated from the Moody Bible Institute (MBI) in Chicago. After checking on several Christian schools, Elva and I felt that the Lord would have me go to Moody and take the 3-year Pastor's Course. Such a decision would mean postponing our marriage for 3 years. It also meant we would be separated by a thousand miles. This was not an easy decision to make, but we trusted the Lord for His help and proceeded. I applied to MBI and was accepted for the fall of 1935.

After we made our decision, the word got around in our church that I was going away to Bible school. What a shock I received when some of the church members approached me and asked doubtfully, "Where are you going to get the money?" "Are you going to leave your job and go out to Chicago?" I thought, *What foolish questions from believers, who have been Christians for many years!* They should have known about trusting the Lord by faith. My answer to them was, "The Lord will provide. I can't take my job with me, so I'm going on faith." I had to work hard for those 3 years, but the Lord never failed to provide, as He has promised in His Word.

Shortly after making the decision to go to Moody, I arranged to meet with my boss at the office to inform him that I was leaving the company. I explained that God had called me to study for the ministry and I would be leaving to attend Bible school in Chicago. Surprised, he looked at me, leaned back in his big chair, and said, "Blair, you are a fool! With thousands of young people walking the streets looking for work, are you going to throw away your good job to study for the ministry? If you do, you are a fool!" He continued by saying, "Let me tell you one thing. You will be back here within a month looking for your old job." I replied, "Sir, if I don't make it in Chicago, I guarantee you I will never be back here."

The Lord enabled me to keep that promise. I never needed to go back. Although things got awfully difficult at times, working 40 hours a week and carrying a full schedule at school, the Lord supplied all my needs all through my 3 years of Bible school. By God's grace, I never had to go into debt and was always able to pay my bills on time.

My next hurdle was to tell my mother I was planning to leave home, which I knew would be difficult. When I told her, she was quite disturbed, primarily because I would no longer be bringing my salary home. I assured her that I knew the Lord would undertake and she would make it without me, which I firmly believed. God

doesn't do things halfway. He does them completely. I knew also that my mother was an excellent manager of money. She could stretch a dollar further than anybody I've ever known. She could make much out of little, whether it was food or money.

The night before I was to leave for Chicago, Elva and I went down to the railroad station to buy a one-way excursion ticket. It was Labor Day weekend and the railroad had a good bargain. After taking Elva to her home, I went on to my home. Going up to my room, I heard Mother crying in her room. I went in and asked, "What's wrong, Ma?" She said, "Son, if you leave me and go to Chicago tomorrow, don't you ever come home again." I was so stunned that I didn't know what to say, so I said nothing. I simply turned and went into my room, got on my knees, and said, "Lord, I am confused. Whatever You want me to do, I will do. If You want me to stay here and be a Christian businessman, I will do it. If You want me to go to Chicago and prepare to serve You, I will go. But I need to know."

I paused and the thought came to me to open the Word of God. I did, and what did I see? Galatians 1:15-18, which says, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem

to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days."

Nothing could have been more certain. God made it unquestionably clear. He called me to preach and I was to obey Him whatever the cost. I went back into my mother's room and told Mother that I was sorry for her sake, but I had to go to Chicago, for I knew the Lord had called me to the Gospel ministry. Then I assured her that when we do His will He always undertakes. She had no comment.

The Lord was faithful, as He always is, in providing for my mother. One of her uncles who was a widower wrote and asked that since she now had a vacant room, could he come and board at our house. Shortly after I left, he moved in and the money problem was solved to a large degree. The Lord never fails.

Another miracle occurred. Surprised by my leaving home, Dad sobered up and went to work. While working on a roof several weeks later, however, he slipped and fell off and broke a leg. He kept sober for 3 months, which was a record. But then, sad to say, after that he went back to the bottle.

Finally the big day had come when I was to leave Atlantic City and travel to Chicago. It was pretty exciting, for I had never been farther away

from home than Philadelphia, which was 60 miles from Atlantic City.

I was up early and got ready quickly. It was difficult leaving home with my mother's negative attitude. When the time came, I said, "Ma, I am sorry to leave you but I know the Lord will provide." There was no reply, only a few tears.

I went over to Elva's house, for she planned to accompany me as far as Philadelphia. We hurried to the station and boarded the train. In about 60 minutes we arrived in west Philadelphia, where we had a brief visit until time for the Chicago train. The hard part really began as I was leaving Elva for an entire year. We decided to write a letter every day—which we did. With only a few minutes left, we hugged and kissed several times and then I boarded the train and found a seat so I could wave to Elva. Slowly the train pulled out and the long time of separation began.

Then the Lord had a pleasant surprise for me. During my days of weight lifting, I had been a regular reader of the health magazines. One name and picture that appeared frequently was of Johnny Grimeck of Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Through weight lifting, Johnny had developed one of the most perfect physiques a man could have, and I admired him greatly. After the train pulled out of the terminal area, I looked across the aisle and who was seated there but Johnny Grimeck! I went over and made myself known.

He invited me to sit with him and we had a most interesting visit all the way to Chicago. I never expected to have such a privilege. The Lord used Johnny to help ease the pain of leaving the girl I loved.

When we arrived in Chicago the next day, I joined five other young people from Atlantic City, who had been on the train and were also going to Moody. We hailed a cab together, packed our luggage in, and arrived at the school about 30 minutes later.

Chapter Five

Chicago, Illinois

1935–1938

It was a thrilling sight when I stood on the corner of Chicago Avenue and LaSalle Street in Chicago on September 4, 1935, and saw the Moody Bible Institute for the first time. The buildings were old and appeared somewhat run-down, but they looked good to me.

I bowed my head and thanked the Lord that He made it all possible. It was not long until I was enrolled and deep in study. It wasn't easy, because I had not applied myself in high school and had been away from study for about 5 years. But now that I had a new life, I was ready to do my best for the Lord.

How gratifying it was for me to sit under the teaching of gifted men like James M. Gray, P. B. Fitzwater, Wilbur M. Smith, Kenneth Wuest, and many others.

My first week in class proved to be awfully difficult for me. It all seemed quite foreign, especially my introduction to New Testament Greek. By the end of the week, I was feeling pretty confused. I decided that since I had no Sunday

obligations, I would skip church and just study all day long and try to catch up with things. I followed that plan. But on Monday morning I awakened with the flu and had to spend the entire week in bed, missing classes, and getting further behind. After that experience, I never studied on the Lord's Day again but always used the day to worship and honor Christ.

Shortly after my arrival at MBI, I learned that all the students were given practical work assignments, at which time we were sent out to serve the Lord. One of my assignments the first semester was a large street meeting on Sunday nights on a busy corner in Chicago. Our team of about 25 students boarded a bus and we were taken to the area. An experienced student was in charge and everything was done in a very orderly fashion.

I had done quite a bit of witnessing and speaking in my hometown before I came to Moody, so I was quite eager to have a part in the meeting, besides singing with the other members of the group. The leader finished leading the singing with his trombone, and after the special music the time came to speak. He walked over toward me and I thought, *Oh great, he is going to ask me to say something.* Instead, he said, "Would you mind holding my trombone while I speak?" I learned an important lesson in humility that night.

About a month after coming to MBI, I re-

ceived a letter from my mother. This was the first time she had written since I left. In it she apologized for what she had said and assured me that I could return home anytime I wanted. Looking back, I am convinced that my mother's reaction to my leaving had been instigated by Satan in an attempt to deter me from fulfilling God's plan for my life. The letter was certainly consoling, for my mother's attitude had greatly disturbed me.

Enclosed with my mother's letter was a newspaper clipping taken from the obituary column in the *Atlantic City Daily Press*. It told about my friend Bill Jewel, who died suddenly with a kidney disease I never knew he had. I don't think he did either.

This news came as a shock to me, for I thought of my last visit with Bill. The Sunday night before I left for Moody, Elva and I were walking the mile or so to our church for the evening service. Bill surprised us when he drove up behind us in his old car and shouted, "Are you going my way?" A young woman was seated with him, puffing on a cigarette. Elva and I got in the back seat, and as we talked on our way to the church I said, "Bill, I am leaving tomorrow to study for the ministry in Chicago. Will you do me a big favor tonight?" He said, "Sure, what is it?" I said, "Come in to church with us."

I had already witnessed to Bill previously,

but he showed no interest in what I had to say. In answer to my question that night, he replied, "Maybe I'll do that." When we stopped in front of the church, Elva and I got out while Bill sat there with a grin on his face. I asked, "Are you coming?" He said, "Look, those things are all right for you, but not for me." And with that he sped off and I never saw him again. How tragic that Bill said "No" to God. How many times since then I have thought, *That could have been me, but for the grace of God!*

During my first semester, Elva informed me in one of her letters that she had 2 weeks of vacation at Christmastime and was going to come to Chicago by bus and visit me. I assure you that it was a very enjoyable and delightful visit. It was a sad day when she had to leave.

Now it was wintertime. It was just beginning to turn cold in Chicago, and I was feeling the chill. If you have ever been to Chicago in winter and felt the cold breeze coming off Lake Michigan, you know what I am talking about. I had brought my overcoat from home, and although it was rather shabby, any kind of overcoat is worthwhile in Chicago in the winter.

I hung it on a hook in the hall, just before going into the kitchen to wash dishes. After several hours I finished my job, and when I came for my coat it was gone. I should have known better than to hang it there because the hooks were just down the steps from a door to the

street, and I was told that outsiders would frequently come in and look around to see what they could pick up.

My first thought was that perhaps my roommate had played a trick on me and hid it as a prank. But he assured me that he had not seen it. I started for the information desk to report it. On the way, I got a better idea. I thought to myself, *God knows where the coat is and He can recover it.* So I went to my room and got on my knees and told Him how badly I needed that coat. It was cold outside, but my heart was warmed with the Lord's perfect peace, and I left my worry with Him.

Two days passed. When I went to my mailbox, there was one letter in it from New Jersey. I opened it up and read about halfway through, and then there was this sentence: "Enclosed is a check for \$25. Get yourself a new overcoat or whatever you need."

God didn't return my shabby overcoat, but He gave me a new one instead. I once heard Dr. Walter L. Wilson say, "God is not in the junk business. When He does something, He does it right!" That was certainly true regarding my overcoat. Of course, this was back in the days when you could buy the best quality overcoat for \$25. I bought one for \$15 and it was perfect for my need.

After several months, our studies were interrupted abruptly by a scarlet fever epidemic

that broke out among the one thousand students. No one was supposed to leave campus, lest the disease be spread to other parts of the city. The school was under strict quarantine.

Before my roommate and I heard that we were not to leave the school, we thought we would be smart and move from the school over to the Lawson YMCA several blocks away, where we got a double room. Our first night went well. But the next morning we heard a police report on the radio that any students who left Moody should return immediately. We learned that we were not so smart after all.

Hundreds of students were sick with scarlet fever. Ambulances were loaded day after day with the extremely ill students and rushed off to the Cook County Sanitarium. The Lord kept me well through it all. In fact, I was given the job of being a male nurse to take the temperatures every hour of those who were moderately ill.

Many changes had to be made in the school to accommodate the various needs as a result of the epidemic. One entire building became a hospital. Another building was designated for those who did not have the illness but could have been carriers of the bacteria. Still another was reserved for those who were well.

The dining room had to be divided and made into two separate rooms, and another expense was the purchase of costly sterilizing

equipment. Regular classes resumed after several months, but it took additional time to get things back to normal.

In my second semester, I needed to find employment, because I had come to Moody with only enough money for the first semester. In addition to my job in the kitchen, washing dishes, I also scrubbed floors and cleaned toilets. I enjoyed it all because it was for the Lord.

A little later, I was given a much better job. I was assigned to work at the information desk in the Administration Building (the original MBI building and later known as the 153 Building). My hours were 4 in the afternoon till 12 midnight, Monday through Friday, and from midnight to eight o'clock on Sunday morning. I received 35 cents an hour, which adequately provided for my room and board. I was thankful for MBI's policy of making no charge for tuition.

The job at the information desk worked out unusually well for me. I arose early, had devotions and a light breakfast, then I attended classes from 8 to 12 each morning. After lunch, I had 3 hours to study and prepare for the next day. I lived in the same building, so all I had to do to get to work at 4:00 p.m. was run down five flights of stairs and I could be on the job.

Because I had not applied myself in high school as I should have, I missed out on many things that could have helped me when I got saved, especially English grammar. One night

while working at the information desk, one of the professors of English came to the desk and informed me that she had lost her gloves. After her detailed description, I turned and entered the closet behind the information desk where all the lost and found items were kept.

I knew the clothing was on the top shelf, so I climbed the ladder to make a quick search. When I thought I had found the gloves, I hung on to the ladder and held them up for the teacher to see and asked, "Is this them?" Her reply was, "Yes, Mr. Blair, those are they." I have made many grammatical errors since that time, but never that same one.

After working several months at the information desk, I almost lost the job because of a little foolish jesting. At 9:00 o'clock each evening, the telephone operator would leave and I had the additional responsibility of running the switchboard in a little room behind the desk.

Then at about 11:00 p.m. the night watchman, who was also a student, would make his rounds on campus and check on the offices. He always entered the president's office, as well as all the faculty members' offices and many other locations on the grounds. Often, while in one of the offices, the watchman would pick up the phone and imitate the person who worked in that office, giving me a foolish request. I usually replied with a foolish answer, then we would laugh and hang up.

One evening while the watchman was making his rounds, the light on the switch-board came on, which signaled a call from my boss' apartment. I was sure it was the watchman. He said, "Mr. Blair, this is Mr. Stauffer. Would you have the watchman go to my office and get a package off my desk, and bring it over to my apartment?" Confident that it was the voice of the watchman, I replied, "Look, Mr. Stauffer, I am a busy student, working my way through school. I don't have time for this sort of thing. If you want it, you just trot over and get it." I laughed and hung up the phone.

Shortly afterward, Mr. Stauffer came and stood in the doorway. He looked at me and glared. Then he walked over to the desk slowly and said sternly, "Mr. Blair, what do you mean by this?" I was speechless. Finally, I grinned and said, "I'm sorry." Fortunately for me, he was a very gracious Christian and forgave me as he said, "Don't let it happen again." You can be sure, it never did! I learned that there is a time to play and a time not to play.

After my first year of training was completed, I went back to Atlantic City, where Elva and I had a wonderful month together, serving the Lord and getting reacquainted with each other. The time passed all too quickly and soon I was on my way back for my second year. It was a good year. I was able to do well in my studies, and soon I was accepting preaching en-

gements and serving the Lord in other opportunities that came my way.

In my second year of study, Elva wrote and told me that the Lord had opened the way for her to enroll in Moody as a special student during my third and final year. That was good news and it was a wonderful year all the way through to graduation. In the Christian life, the Lord gives many happy surprises that could not be known without Him.

When I was in my senior year, I was contacted by a church in Peoria, Illinois, which needed a pastor. Several weeks later, I spoke there as a candidate and they extended a call to me. Another fellow student, Herbert Lockyer Jr., also had a pastorate in the area, so together we commuted to Peoria by railroad every Saturday night on the Rock Island Rocket and returned on Monday morning.

One Saturday night, Herb and I got on the train and found seats in the same car where the Bradley College basketball team was celebrating a big victory at Madison Square Garden in New York. The members of the team were on their way home after winning the National Basketball Championship.

When we arrived in Peoria, Herb and I got off the train and the team followed us. About a thousand people were waiting to welcome the team, so as Herb and I stepped off the train the band started to play and the crowd was cheering.

I said to Herb, "It was never like this before!" We had a great evening with lots of fun.

The church I served had been founded by Mr. Fred Thomas, a retired mailman who was a member of the large First Methodist Church in Peoria. More than 40 years earlier, God laid a burden on Mr. Thomas' heart to reach boys and girls for Christ and to help the many poor people living on the south side of Peoria who were unemployed. Being a man of vision with a loving heart, Mr. Thomas with his wife, Laura, operated Hope Mission and did a great work for the Lord. After Mr. Thomas was called to his heavenly home, it was not easy for me as an inexperienced young student to fill his shoes, but I gave it my best and the Lord blessed the teaching of His precious Word.

In the ensuing months, the work in Peoria grew and lives were changed. To celebrate my first year as pastor, we had a Gospel team and a faculty member from MBI to conduct a weekend Bible conference. After the Sunday morning service, I stood at the door greeting people as they left. The faculty member was taking movies of the people as they came out. The church was very small, but we had about 200 people crowded inside for the services that day. As they filed out, they kept coming and coming.

When the faculty member returned to MBI, he showed the movies in one of our student assemblies and everyone was laughing. Someone

said all those people were just going in the back door and coming out the front again and again, which of course was not true. God blessed that dedicated group of people in a special way.

Later, we changed the name of the church from Hope Mission to Thomas Memorial Church in honor of the faithful couple who established the work and for 42 years had given themselves in faithful service and sacrifice to God.

Having finished my 3 years at MBI, I was ready for graduation. The Lord enabled me to get A's and B's all the way through except for one C. It was most gratifying when the men of our senior class chose me to have the honor of being their speaker on Commencement Day.

We were delighted that my mother and her uncle were able to come for the graduation services. During my days at Moody, I had been able to save enough money to buy a little car, so after graduation day the four of us along with another student, George Gay, headed for Atlantic City. George lived in Niagara Falls, New York, and in the providence of the Lord he had invited us to stay at his parents' home for our honeymoon. Our plan was to drive to Atlantic City, have a church wedding, with George as my best man, and then continue on to Niagara Falls.

We arrived in Atlantic City on Saturday afternoon. On the following Monday morning, Elva and I went to the City Hall to get our marriage license. When the clerk asked what day we were

planning to be married, I replied, "This next Wednesday." She said, "You can't be married Wednesday. Three days must elapse from the time you apply before the wedding, which would make it Thursday." I explained that we were having a church wedding, all the invitations had been sent out, and everything was planned.

There was a pause. She looked around and whispered, "I will date your application last Friday and all will be well." Elva stepped up and said, "Oh no, you can't do that. It would be dishonest." At that point I spoke up and told the clerk, "Go ahead. Fill out the paper." Then I said to Elva, "You may be perfectly honest all the rest of your life, but right now we are getting this license!" The wedding went as planned.

Following the wedding reception in a hotel, Elva and I, with George Gay and the maid of honor, Alice Lands, left for Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, to take Alice home. From there we drove on to New York, where we had two rooms in a hotel—one for George and one for Elva and me.

The next morning, we left for Niagara Falls. On the way, one of our tires blew out, which we replaced for \$25. When Elva and I left the church after the wedding, we had \$25 to our name. A lady was standing in the crowd with the others at the door. As we were leaving, she shook hands with me and handed me \$25, which paid for the tire. We arrived at Niagara Falls and had a de-

lightful week. After our honeymoon, Elva and I returned to Atlantic City and then went on to Peoria, Illinois, where we began our fulltime work at Thomas Memorial Church.



Pastor J. Allen Blair

Chapter Six

Peoria, Illinois

1938-1943

One of the first things we had to do in Peoria was find housing. There was a parsonage next-door to the church, but it was fully occupied. It was used for Sunday school rooms, as well as a home for a young woman who was the church visitor. The aged sexton also lived there. Of course, that meant there was no room for us.

The Lord guided us to a couple of rooms nearby, where we lived for our first year. Then, when the sexton left, and later the church visitor also left, we renovated several rooms in the parsonage for an apartment and moved in.

There was a faithful body of people at Thomas Memorial. They were good workers and dedicated to the Lord. Also, the Lord kept encouraging us by sending us new people. Attendance while we were there was quite unusual. We had about twice as many people who came to the evening service as those who attended in the morning. This was due to the employment situation in the area, which often required Sunday work.

Shortly after arriving in Peoria, I enrolled at Bradley College and continued attending all through the 5 years we were at the church. The Lord was pleased to give us our first child while we were at Thomas. Elva awakened me about 1:30 a.m. saying, "I need to get to the hospital." Elva was in labor until about 11:00 that night when we were greeted with Sherril Sandra. Back in those days, the husband could not be with his wife prior to or during the birth. I paced the halls of the Methodist Hospital trying to study for a history exam scheduled for early the next morning. I took the exam, but my mind was in a whirl and I knew I had flunked the exam.

Several days later when I went to the class, the professor asked me to remain after class. When I went to him he said, "Why didn't you tell me? When I corrected your paper I said to myself, 'What in the world has happened to Blair—he never wrote an exam like this.'"

Then he told me that after correcting papers he was reading the evening newspaper, and when he noticed our names in the birth announcements he realized what had happened. He said, "When I corrected the papers I gave you an F, but after I read the newspaper I went back and changed it to a C." Then he said, "Why didn't you tell me? I would have said, 'Go home and forget the exam!'"

After about a year as pastor of the church, the Board asked if I could be ordained. We pro-

ceeded to form an independent council because the church was not affiliated with a denomination. Among the nine members we chose for the Ordination Council was Harold E. Garner from the MBI faculty. Others were Robert A. Cook and Torrey M. Johnson, founders and leaders of the well-known Youth for Christ movement that had spread all across the United States and into foreign countries. Pastors and Christian laymen comprised the rest of the Council.

The Ordination Service was held in the Kasbeer Community Church, Kasbeer, Illinois, on November 10, 1939. When I finished college and seminary and was called to the First Presbyterian Church of Le Roy, Minnesota, it was necessary to be ordained there by the Presbyterian Church, U.S. Some time later, when I was called to St. Louis, I chose to leave the denomination, realizing that my Presbyterian ordination would no longer be valid. So I reverted to my original independent council ordination, which I have carried ever since.

One night after prayer meeting, Gladys Spencer, one of our faithful young members, was collecting money to buy food for the upcoming youth banquet and conference to be led by a group from Moody the following weekend. After everyone had gone, Gladys left when we did and walked with us to the parsonage next-door. She continued on down the street to catch a street car, and we had just gotten in the door when we heard

her scream. We ran outside and heard Gladys yell, "He's got my purse!" We saw a man running down a narrow street ahead of her. It was very dark and we couldn't see much but we saw his form. She was running after him. I took off after him too and soon passed Gladys and was able to keep up with the man, about 30 feet behind him.

We ran several blocks and he went out to the main road after the narrow street ended. He ran across the lighted road, dashed between a couple of cars, and down another block. Then he turned left into another street and I saw him run into a yard up ahead. When I got there, the house was dark and the alley was black as pitch. I knew better than to go into the alley. So we got a policeman and went to the front door of the house and asked for the man of the house. The young woman said, "He isn't here, he's working at LeTourneau's." We asked his name and she gave it to us. Later we checked with LeTourneau's and were told he didn't report for work that night.

The next morning we got a pleasant surprise. A woman phoned Gladys and informed her that she had found the purse in her backyard. The house bordered on the narrow street we ran through the night before. The woman said the purse had a lot of money in it and Gladys' identification. The man had thrown the purse over the fence when he got near the lighted street. All the money was still intact.

I had gotten a good look at the man when he went out on the lighted street. He was wearing a tan leather jacket, and I could see his build. About a week later I was sure I saw the man at Bradley College. He was wearing the same jacket and I was certain it was the same person—there was no doubt in my mind.

Later, when I saw him again at Bradley, I stopped him and had a conversation with him. Along with other things, I asked, "What is your name and where do you live?" He told me, and lo and behold, it was that same house we had gone to that night!

Every once in a while I saw him pass our house. One time I was washing our car and he yelled, "How's Bradley?" The Lord cleared everything up for us and returned the money. The weekend was an outstanding success and we praised God for His provision.

Mr. and Mrs. Lea had been faithful attendants at our church for some time. Mr. Lea died very suddenly, and I was asked by the family to conduct his funeral service. Mrs. Lea informed me that she was going to get things together as soon as possible and move back to the small Pennsylvania town where she had been reared. She wanted to spend the rest of her days with her friends and loved ones. She sold her house very quickly and made plans to leave for Pennsylvania the following Monday morning.

At the close of our Sunday evening ser-

vice, the night before her departure, I was greeting folks at the door as they left the church. When Mrs. Lea came by, she exclaimed, "Pastor, I am going home! I sold my house, I am all packed, and tomorrow morning I fly to Pennsylvania." Then she said, "What a thrill it is to go home!" I assured her that I could well understand how she felt.

She left the church and I continued to talk with other folks as they were leaving. In the space of a few minutes, I heard the squealing of tires and a loud thud. Quickly, I looked out the doorway and saw someone lying in the street. All of us ran out, and we found that it was Mrs. Lea. She was killed instantly as she tried to cross the busy street. Mrs. Lea had planned to go home in the morning—but she went to her eternal Home the night before. I am sure it was a delight for her to be with her husband again, and greatest of all to be in the presence of her Lord and Savior.

Often we make our plans, but then we find that God has other plans. In my thinking, the most important plan any of us should make is the one Mrs. Lea had made long before—to meet Him when He calls.

It is a tragedy for anyone to tell God "tomorrow" when He says "today." If you have never settled your eternal relationship with Jesus Christ the Son of God, do it as soon as possible, so that when your time comes to pass from this

life to the next, you will go home to be with the Lord forever.

In our congregation we had several young mothers who were greatly concerned about their husband's salvation. There was hardly a prayer service in our church when they did not request prayer for them.

Mabel had three children, and we were planning to have a New Year's party at her house for the young people. Paul, her husband, had always been in the habit of going out on New Year's Eve with some of "the boys," to get drunk and have what he thought was a good time. But since Mabel was having the party in their home, reluctantly he stayed at home to help.

Part of the recreation that evening was a series of games in which we went from table to table to play. In the course of the evening, Paul was playing games in a group that included my wife, but he didn't know who she was. They laughed and had fun together. Later someone asked him if he knew who was playing games in his group. "No," he said. When he was told that it was the preacher's wife, Paul could hardly get over it. His idea of Christians had been that they were a down-in-the-mouth sort of people who could not laugh.

Near 12 midnight during our testimony and prayer time, Paul spoke up and gave his honest and sincere testimony, saying, "I played games in Mrs. Blair's group tonight, and if all

Christians are as happy as she is I want to become a Christian.” That night when we were all on our knees praying, Paul turned his life over to Jesus Christ and became a faithful witness to what a real Christian should be. Later he taught Sunday school, conducted jail meetings, and was a strong witness for the Lord at the railroad where he worked.

Lillian was another mother with a real concern for her husband Art, who operated a gas station. Art, like Paul, never attended church. In fact, he had no interest in church. Every Sunday evening he would drive his wife and two boys to our church for the evening service, and after letting the family out he would continue on to the movies. After the show, he would pick them up and take them home.

Art drank heavily and one morning he came home extremely drunk, so much so that while coming through the backyard he fell and couldn't get up. When Lillian came down in the morning and looked out the window, she saw Art, still lying on the cold ground. She and their two boys managed to drag him in and get him on a cot. He was sick all week, deathly sick.

When Sunday night came, he drove the family to the church as usual, but parked the car. When Lillian and the boys got out of the car, he got out also and went into the church with them. Providentially, I preached an evangelistic message that night. Following the message, real-

izing what a miserable life he was living, Art responded to the invitation, turned his life over to Jesus Christ, and became a faithful servant for the Lord. Later, Art had a burden for children and did a marvelous work among them.

He continued to run the gas station as always, 7 days a week. After he had experienced some growth in the Lord, I said to him one day, "Art, have you ever thought of closing the station on Sunday and letting that be a testimony to the community?" There were a number of other stations in the vicinity and competition was strong. Art replied, "No, I never really thought of it. But I will pray about it."

About a month later, Art came to our morning service with his family. After the service, I saw him and said, "What happened?" He said, "The shop is closed on Sundays from now on." He continued to grow in his knowledge of the Lord and about a year after we left the church to go to seminary, I learned that he had turned the station over to his two boys and he went to the Child Evangelism International headquarters for training. Not long after he finished his training, he was made Illinois State Director of Child Evangelism Fellowship.

Mrs. Brandt was another heavy-hearted mother in our congregation. She had three small boys. Her husband worked at Keystone Wire and Steel Company. He was a large man and very strong. He, like the other two men, drank heavi-

ly. I made repeated calls on the family at a time when the husband was supposed to be home. But if he heard my voice as I entered the front door, he left quickly by way of the back door. I could never catch up with him. He kept on the run whenever I came near the house.

Early one morning I heard from his wife, who said, "My husband is in Methodist Hospital. He shot himself last night." She explained that he had come home drunk some time after midnight. He had begun to argue with her, and for some reason he went and got his gun and shot himself in the abdomen.

When I arrived at the hospital, he was lying on a hospital cot and appeared to be dead. I talked, but there was no response. So I said something like this: "Mr. Brandt, God loves you. In fact, His only Son died for you so that you could have eternal life. In spite of what your life has been, if you were to trust in Jesus Christ at this moment, you would be eternally saved. Will you trust Him?" I took hold of his hand and squeezed it, and very slowly he nodded his head up and down. His eyes never opened, but I prayed and thanked the Lord that Mr. Brandt had received Christ. I knew that if the Lord should be pleased to take him, he would go to be with Him forever.

I went on home, called various people in the church, and asked them to be in prayer for Mr. Brandt, saying, "This man could be a real

testimony for God. Let's ask God, if He so wills, to raise him up."

After several weeks, Mr. Brandt began to improve. He was in the hospital 3 months. I called on him day after day. We had some great talks together. One day when I went in he said, "Pastor, I am going home Friday. And where do you think the first place is that I am going to go?" I asked, "Where?" He said, "Your church. I will be there Sunday morning."

What a beautiful sight it was to see three little boys, their mother, and Mr. Brandt walk down the center aisle and sit in the second pew. It was a thrilling day for his wife and boys, for me and my wife, and for many others in the congregation to see this man take a stand for Jesus Christ. Not only that, he never missed a service after that. He also became vitally interested in young people, helping them so that they wouldn't make the same mistakes he had made when he was a young person.

There is a question that appears in the Bible, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14). The answer to that is, no, there is nothing too hard for Him. As believers, we should never give up on anyone, but pray and trust God. He is able to do all things. I have often said, "If He could save me, He could save anybody."

My college days in Peoria were happy days, though very busy days. Going to college was not

easy while being involved in a fulltime pastorate. The Lord gave guidance and strength, however, and I enjoyed the honor of being made a member of the Bradley Federation of Scholars with at least a B average throughout my years of work. To the Lord I give all the praise, for I could not have done it without Him. Nor could I have done it without my good wife, who was always there to help and encourage me.

Having completed my undergraduate work with a B.A. degree, I began to think about Seminary. This seemed to be God's leading for my next move.

We hated to leave our friends at Thomas Memorial Church. They were such good workers and devoted to the Lord. Thomas Memorial was where we began our pastoral ministry, and it was while there that we had our first home, God gave us our first daughter, I conducted my first wedding, first funeral, and first communion service. We have many precious memories of those faithful people.

It was a tearful farewell the day we left that dedicated body of believers in Peoria. God gave us some wonderful friends and memories in that little church. How good those people were to us!

Chapter Seven

Savanna, Illinois

1943–1944

After finishing Bible school and college, I had an earnest desire to prepare myself to be the best I could be for the Lord. When I heard that the Theological University of Dubuque might give two-thirds credit for my 3 years of schooling at Moody Bible Institute, Elva and I decided to drive up to Dubuque, Iowa, to see what they had to offer. Shortly after arriving at the University, we met with the Dean. He was very cordial and invited me to come to the Seminary. He offered me the two-thirds credit for my MBI work if I could carry senior courses and pass with good grades. This meant I could be graduated in one year.

Needing employment, I asked if there were any churches looking for a pastor, where I could candidate. His reply was, “No, there hasn’t been a vacant pulpit in the area for many months. Then he added, “If you will be dependent on pastoring a church, I would advise you not to come.”

As Elva and I drove back home, we agreed that the Lord led us to go to Dubuque, so He could certainly open the door and provide a

church. As we prayed during the days ahead, we were confident that the Lord wanted us to trust Him and go in time for the opening of the fall semester. We resigned from Thomas Memorial, loaded up our Ford with most all of our belongings, along with our little daughter and small dog, and headed for Dubuque. Arriving late in the afternoon, we spent the next several hours looking for an apartment. All we could find was one large room on the second floor of a home close to town. We rented it and moved in as quickly as possible.

The next morning I drove the 2 miles to the school. It was situated in the higher part of town and had a very pleasant setting. All my books and some of our belongings were still packed in the back of the car.

After enrolling and attending the morning session, I was on my way home. Just as I was leaving the campus, I noticed smoke pouring out from under the hood. When I pulled over to the side of the road and lifted the hood, flames burst out. A woman, seeing it from her home, called out, "Is your car on fire?" "Yes!" I shouted. "Call the fire department!" The firemen arrived within minutes and quickly sprayed the motor and extinguished the fire. The paint was burned off the hood and all the rubber was burned off the wires. Bewildered and confused, I locked the car and walked home. Elva and I prayed for God's help for our problem. Because we had only \$12

to our name after paying the rent and enrolling at school, the situation looked hopeless.

The next morning I walked to school and found a note in my mailbox telling me to report to the Dean's office. He informed me that he had a church that needed a pastor, located 40 miles from the seminary. He said, "For 10 years it has been a very liberal church. It will be a hard ministry. But," he said, "you have been to the Moody Bible Institute. Let's see what your evangelical training can do." Then he asked, "Are you willing to accept the challenge?" I replied, "I am willing."

This created another problem. I promised the people in Peoria that I would come back and help them for a few Sundays until they were able to locate someone. I didn't have enough money to get to Peoria by train, and now I needed the money we had to fix the car.

After classes, I went to the car and looked it over. I thought if I could get new distributor wires and put them on, I might be able to drive to Peoria, or even to Savanna, Illinois, where the church needing a pastor was located. I tried to start the car but was not successful, so I decided to try to coast down the 2-mile hill to home. The Lord enabled me to coast right up to the front of the house. It was a scary ride, but I prayed all the way and the path was clear.

The next morning, being Saturday, I went down to the Western Auto Store and bought a set of distributor wires along with a small can of

black paint for the hood and a paint brush. After the purchase, I knew I didn't have enough money to buy gas to get to Peoria, so I phoned one of the Board members and explained my problem. He replied, "We knew you never should have left Peoria. Now look at the mess you're in." I assured him that God would undertake and we were trusting Him to work things out.

I worked on the car all day. Although I knew little about cars, I carefully followed the directions that came with the wires. At the end of the day, I got in the car, put in the key, turned on the ignition, and the car ran as well as it ever did. I painted the hood and we were ready to go to the Community Church of Savanna on Sunday morning. At the close of the service, a member of the Board handed me a check for \$18.00 and invited me to come back the next Sunday. The \$18.00 got us through the following week and we returned the next Sunday with only 5 cents left.

We were asked to meet with the Board after the service, and they invited me to be their pastor. After working out the details, we agreed. As we drove home, Elva and I made plans to move to the parsonage next-door to the church. It was a large, old house with eleven rooms. We realized that the few pieces of furniture we had would easily fit into one room, so we decided to make our quarters in the dining room and kitchen.

We had left our few pieces of furniture in Peoria until we knew where we would be going. In a few days, one of the men from Thomas Memorial brought the furniture up for us in his pick-up. In several more days, we were moved in and settled. The house had not been lived in for a long time and was inhabited by a large family of mice. On the first night, the mice invaded while we were sleeping in the dining room, and I killed eleven of them with a broom. After killing a few more, we pretty well had them cleaned out.

I worked out a schedule of either leaving for school Monday mornings at 4:30 a.m. by train or at 6:00 a.m. by car and returning Friday afternoons.

Things went pretty well at the seminary and at the church. But as the Dean had warned, the church was a very difficult work. Most of the people knew little about the Bible and about God's way of salvation. Of course, this provided quite a challenge, but it also proved to be a great opportunity.

The whole town of Savanna was a needy mission field. Because it was a railroad town, I found it difficult to get men involved in the church program. Most of them worked irregular hours on one of the two major railroads running in the vicinity of Savanna.

World War II had recently begun and many young people were entering the service of our country. At the same time, they were breaking

up housekeeping and selling all their furniture. On occasion, instead of taking the train to school, I drove our car. I was able to pick up pieces of furniture at excellent prices and went home loaded with furniture. It wasn't long until we had the first floor of our big house looking like a home.

Attendance at the church was growing and we were encouraged. Especially were we delighted with the seven or eight Christian military men from the Savanna Ordnance Depot located only a few miles outside of town. They came to all our services and spent much time in our home. There was a large USO in the city, where most of the service men and women congregated, so we decided to make our home a Christian place of entertainment for the young military personnel. We had a ping-pong table and numerous other games. To have these Christian young people coming to our home was a great encouragement to Elva and me, for we had very little Christian fellowship in the church during the first year.

Most of the people in the church were cordial but were not instructed in spiritual things. In spite of their lack of understanding, the Holy Spirit did a marvelous work. Several families came out-and-out for the Lord, and God reached many hearts for Himself. We knew He would honor His Word, as He promised.

Most people in Savanna were doing what they could to help in the war effort. Many of them

had victory gardens, and we decided to have one too, as there was a nice plot of ground behind the church.

Elva and I purchased a box of seeds at Sears Roebuck and Company for \$1.00. In the box were about a dozen assorted vegetable seeds, and we planted them all. Having never planted anything in our lives before, we waited with expectancy to see if anything would happen. It did! And we had the most flourishing garden anyone could ever expect—tall corn, beans, carrots, tomatoes, spinach, and lettuce, all for the \$1.00 investment. The garden was beautiful. And better still, all the vegetables were tasty, and they also helped us with our expenses.

I completed my year at the seminary and it was time for graduation. It was another exciting day in our lives when I received a Master of Divinity Degree. I now had completed 8 years of study and was ready to give my best for the Lord in Christian service. Elva and I decided that out of fairness to our congregation, we should give our people in Savanna at least a year of fulltime service. We plunged in with a full program and God continued to work wonders.

Toward the end of our second year in Savanna, I was invited to be a candidate for the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church in Le Roy, Minnesota. We had no idea where Le Roy was, so we looked it up on the map and found it to be almost on the southern border of the state. I

arranged to go to the church and candidate. We still had little money, so on Saturday morning I went out to the highway and hitched rides to Le Roy, Minnesota. That was back in the days when it was not considered dangerous to get into a stranger's car.

I arrived in Le Roy on Saturday evening and was well received by one of the church Elders. I candidate the next day and found a small congregation of delightful people who really loved God's Word and were spiritually hungry. This appealed to me.

When I returned home, Elva and I prayed together that we might know God's will about the new opening. In time, the Lord directed us to accept the challenge of the opportunity we saw in Le Roy—people wanting the Word of God. So, feeling that we should follow the Lord's leading, Elva and I made our plans to pack up and leave Savanna. This was not easy, for we had made some wonderful friends there.

Chapter Eight

Le Roy, Minnesota

1944–1948

My wife and I were unfamiliar with country living. Elva was born in Philadelphia, and I in Atlantic City. Consequently, both of us were as ignorant as anyone could be about rural life. Naturally, it didn't take the people in Le Roy long to realize this. Fortunately for us, they were sympathetic and enjoyed many laughs about our ignorance. We learned much about rural living while in Le Roy and have never ceased to thank the Lord for this valuable experience.

Very soon after I arrived in Le Roy, I requested a meeting with the Elders. Among other things, I asked the men to give me some help in locating the homes of the members of the church. I told them I wanted to call on all of the members in one week and I needed three men for each of the 5 days: one for the morning, one for the afternoon, and one for the evening. They cooperated very well and each of the men was there to help me. Most of our people had large farms with five or six hundred acres of land or more, and they were scattered for miles. It would have

taken me many months on my own to find where they lived. Following this week of visitation, I had an overview of the whole membership, and my future calls were made with little difficulty.

One of our calls was several miles south of town. When we stopped at the house, the wife of the 35-year-old farmer expressed gratitude to see us, but she said, "My husband is out in the field. You can probably see him out there."

We went out where we could see him and waved. He saw us and came riding in on his tractor and got off. The Elder had told me before we called at the house that this man had not been to church for a long time. After a brief visit I asked, "When have you last been to church?" He said, "Well, it's been a long while. But you know, Pastor, the war is on and we farmers can't get the help we need and there is so much to do. And as you know, we farmers have to make hay while the sun shines." "I understand," was my reply. "But we have to honor the One who enables the sun to shine and the crops to grow." He agreed and said, "I will be back one of these days, after the load gets lighter." I reminded him of the importance of putting first things first. I led in prayer and the Board member and I went on our way.

It was about a year later and the young man had not yet returned to church. His mother was a very faithful worshiper. One night at prayer meeting she said, "If you happen to be in

Rochester, I wish you would visit my son. He is having trouble with one leg and is in the Mayo Clinic." Elva and I drove to Rochester, which was only 38 miles from us and visited with the young man. He seemed to be in good spirits and said, "I expect to be home in a few days." After prayer, we returned to Le Roy. He did not get to come home as planned, however. He was in the hospital for several more weeks. The report was cancer—incurable. Later he was sent home to die.

In the following several weeks, I had many visits with this young man. His interests had changed. He was ready to talk about the Lord and the things that really count. The day before he died, I visited him. He was lying on the davenport in the living room, unable to move himself. But after we talked and prayed, he strained to raise himself on one elbow. Then, looking in my direction, he said, "Pastor, wherever you go, please tell people not to make the same mistake I made. I wish I had kept my class of Junior boys that I once had. I made a great mistake."

Many people are making this same mistake today. They are not putting the Lord Jesus Christ first in their lives. He offers the very best in life, but they are willing to settle for less.

The attendance at our church for the first few months was poor, but gradually through prayer, regular calling in the homes, and sound Bible teaching, we saw the Lord beginning to fill

the pews. The auditorium seated about two hundred, and there was a side room off the auditorium which could seat about fifty people.

Anxious to get things moving, I arranged an evangelistic meeting with Michael Guido from Metter, Georgia, as our speaker. He and his wife did an excellent job for us. The Lord gave a real revival—the Sunday school superintendent, several of our Elders, and the young woman who directed the youth work all were saved. From then on, things really began to improve. The blessings started to flow. More people trusted Christ and others became involved in the work of the Lord.

I had not heard from my dad for many months, but one evening he surprised us with a phone call. He said Mother had divorced him and he had no money and nowhere to stay. I told him we would help. We made arrangements for him to travel to Minnesota and stay with us.

When Dad arrived, we met him at the train station and brought him to our home. After a short visit I said, “Dad, there is just one thing. We will make you comfortable in every way. You can stay with us as long as you want. You will have your own room, you can come and go as you please, but there must not be any alcohol at any time. If you drink while you are here, I am sorry but it will be necessary to send you back to New Jersey. With people entering our home at all times, we cannot have alcohol in our home.”

Dad assured me that there would be no al-

cohol at any time, that he was through with it and would never touch it again. I had often heard this before, and each time I hoped it would be real. Things worked out well for several months. Dad spent much time with our two little daughters, Sherril and Judy, which both he and the girls enjoyed immensely. He helped around the house and even built a needed closet in our guest room. He got along well with the people in the church and in the community. He was nice to have around when he was sober.

Dad spent most of his days down at the corner drugstore playing cards with the elderly owner. One evening, however, he came home about supper time. As soon as I saw him, I knew it was the same old problem. "Dad," I said, "you broke your word." He didn't deny it. "You know what that means." I said, "I am sorry to have to tell you, but you will have to leave for New Jersey tomorrow." It nearly broke my heart to say that.

We had learned to appreciate Dad while he was in our home. We thought he meant business this time, because he had done so well for the several months he was with us. But I knew from past experiences that I had to keep my word. If I did not, the future would be the same as the past had been for many years.

One afternoon Elva and I, a young woman named Maxine, and our infant daughter drove to Rochester to shop and to make some calls. While I made my calls at the clinic and Elva did some

shopping, it got very dark and cold and started to snow. The snow accumulated very rapidly. We realized we had to start for home soon if we were to make it. By the time we were halfway home, the shoulders along the road had filled with snow and it was almost impossible to stay on the road. The shoulders and the road appeared to be a flat surface of snow.

Just outside of Le Roy, the back wheel of our car slipped off the road and started down the shoulder. The only way I could possibly get out was to put a chain on the wheel, which appeared hopeless in its present position, packed in the snow off the road. I tried again and again to get the chain on without success. We had to keep the car running all the time because of the extreme cold. It was about 25 degrees below zero. Finally, Elva said, "We're going to the next farmhouse to try to get help." The house was at least a quarter of a mile down the road. I advised them not to go, but they thought they could make it.

Meanwhile, I continued trying to get the chain on, praying as I worked. All of a sudden, the chain slipped on the wheel. I blew the horn and shouted to my wife and Maxine. Then I drove the car out of the ditch, picked them up, and we headed for Le Roy. In a short time we were home, cold but happy and thankful to the Lord. Here was another miraculous answer to prayer. There was no way we could have reached home in human strength. God did it. I could not tell all that God

has done for us in response to prayer down through the years. What a privilege believers have, and yet many fail to pray as they should.

As part of my pastoral ministry, I have always been a strong believer in making calls in the homes of our membership. I heard someone say a long time ago, "A house-going pastor makes a church-going people." From personal experience, I know that to be true.

In addition to the pastor, Board members should be calling in homes. While in Le Roy, I instituted several visitation programs. The first had to do with the communion card system. We planned to have five morning communions and three evening communions a year. Cards were printed with the eight specific dates.

The program involved the Elders, who were to distribute the cards personally in the homes and visit with the people eight times a year. Then, on a specified communion Sunday all the church members were to bring the cards, put them in the offering plate, and have a gold star placed on the date. The cards were then to be returned to the individuals by the Board members just before the next scheduled communion Sunday.

After I told our Board about the plan, one of the farmers spoke up and said, "That's the first time I ever knew we needed a ticket to take communion!" They all agreed to try it. Not only did it get the Board members in the homes to

visit with the people, but it got the people coming to church at least eight times a year.

On another occasion, we were preparing to have our first Annual Faith Promise Sunday. Rather than have the people bring their faith promises to the church, we asked them to prepare them, and during the afternoon on Faith Promise Sunday, our Elders would call for a short visit and pick up the cards.

For several Sundays I had preached on God's plan for giving, and then in our special morning communion service we dedicated our Elders for their task that afternoon. We asked the people to look forward to seeing the Elders when they came to visit. One man in the church was sternly opposed to the visitation procedure and was very angry about it, but the communion service was a real blessing to all. There seemed to be a special moving of the Holy Spirit.

Immediately after the service, the gentleman who opposed the visitation came to the platform before I could step down. He confronted me by saying, "If you have this visitation this afternoon and pick up the faith promises this way, you can take my name right off the membership roll."

I am sure Satan helped me with my reply. I said, "You know the old saying!" He said, "What's that?" I replied, "It never hurts the apple tree when the bad apples fall off." I was so convicted after I said it, I could hardly step down

from the platform. He stormed down the aisle and out the door.

I had to greet the people with a smile on my face, which was not easy because I knew I had said the wrong thing. As soon as I had lunch I planned to go to his home and try to make things right. But before I finished, one of our Elders phoned and said that he and another Elder would like to see me to talk about the incident that occurred after the morning service.

Shortly afterward, the two men came and said, "Pastor, this man could cause lots of trouble in Le Roy." "I know it," I said, "and I am going over to apologize very quickly." But then I added, "Now that you men have come, I would love to have you join me. Then I will have two witnesses and you will know what was said." They tried every way they could think of to get out of the responsibility, but I convinced them I needed witnesses, so they went with me.

We got no farther than the man's front door. He opened the door and through the storm door he asked, "What do you want?" I said, "I came to apologize for what I said this morning. I want you to know I am very sorry, and I am asking your forgiveness." He stuck his hand around the partially opened storm door, and I squeezed it. He shut the door and I never saw him again.

My conscience was clear and the burden was lifted. I realized once again how subtle the devil is. After hitting a high spot as we did in the

morning service, I became vulnerable for the attack and succumbed.

The canvass of our membership was highly successful. Our Elders were blessed, the people were blessed, and the church was blessed by a decided increase in faith-giving to the Lord's work. Satan tries hard to win the battle, but the Lord always wins.



Allen and Elva Blair

Elva and I always had a concern for individuals in our churches. In the Le Roy congregation was a gifted young school teacher named Joyce. She had the needed gifts to be a missionary for the Lord Jesus Christ, and we began to pray to that end. We talked to her about it, and after a while she decided to go back to college to get the other 2 years needed for her degree. When she returned to Le Roy, however, she became interested in a boyfriend, and the hopes for the mission field seemed to be forgotten.

We continued to pray earnestly for Joyce, for we felt that her boyfriend was not helping her in any way. He gave no evidence of even being a Christian. In time, God answered prayer and the relationship broke up, for which we were very happy. Once again Joyce set her sights on the mission field. Many months after Elva and I left Le Roy and moved to Flushing, Long Island, we received word that Joyce was coming to New York for orientation with her mission board in preparation to leave for Africa. We invited her to stay in our home for the 5 days.

One day a Christian young man who also had his heart set on the mission field invited her to lunch, and from then on things began to blossom quickly. The young man was Harold Davenport, a dedicated believer with a sincere concern for the Lord's work. On another day, Joyce came home and showed us Harold's picture, a fine-looking young man. After the meetings were finished,

Harold was to leave for his home in Seattle, Washington, and Joyce was leaving for Le Roy, Minnesota. Harold asked her if he might stop by on the way and meet Joyce's folks. He did, and soon Harold left for his field and Joyce for hers.

In those days, new missionaries were not allowed to get engaged till several years after meeting each other. So, at the end of the required time, Harold sent his ring for Joyce with another missionary who was on his way to Africa, and Harold and Joyce became engaged. Later they were married and served the Lord faithfully on the mission field for many years. When God does something, he always does it the best way.

Another evidence of the Lord's leading came while Elva and I were serving in Le Roy. After getting to know the situation, we had a special burden for the young people in the community, who had little by way of worthwhile entertainment. About all they knew was riding in cars and going to the movies.

We asked the city fathers if we could have Friday nights in the city park during the warm months for a young people's night. They were more than delighted to oblige. We decided to advertise Friday nights as "Youth Night in the Park" for all young people. They came in droves, grateful that there was something to do. We worked hard on this project and had well-planned evenings with plenty of activities, concluding with a brief Gospel message and refreshments.

In the first couple of years, several pulpit committees from other churches visited us and spoke to us about accepting a new pastorate. But we felt that the time had not come, because there was much more to do and we wanted to finish the job.

While we were in Le Roy, two more daughters were added to our family: Judith Ann and Cynthia Faye. Both girls were born in St. Francis Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota, associated with the Mayo Clinic.

After about three and a half years of serving in Le Roy, I received a letter from the First Presbyterian Church in Flushing, Long Island, stating that my name had been given to them as a possible candidate for their vacant pulpit. The church wanted to know if I would be interested in coming. From all they told me about this busy urban pastorate, it appeared to be a challenging opportunity. After discussing the matter, Elva and I felt that although things were going well in Le Roy, it might be God's time for us to make this move. The Le Roy church was on a solid footing, lives had been changed, some of the young people had gone to Bible school and college to prepare to serve the Lord, and the finances were in excellent condition.

Several weeks after I had responded positively to the letter, I received a telephone call from Mr. Robert Swanson, the general manager of the Thomas Baking Company of Long Island

City. He said he was coming to Chicago for a bakers' convention and he asked if I could meet him in the Union Station to discuss the possibility of the move to Flushing. We arranged the time and place, and after several days I took a train to Chicago. When I arrived at Union Station, I went to the meeting place.

On the phone, Mr. Swanson had told me he was a big man and would be wearing a blue serge suit and a grey Homburg hat. With that description, I found him easily. Walking up to him, I started to say, "Are you Mr. Swanson?" He interrupted and asked, "Are you *It*?" And then he broke into a big smile. He put his big arm around me and said, "Let's pray, Brother." People were passing all around us and he was praying as though he was in a church pulpit. He thanked the Lord for my safe arrival, God's provision, and many other things. I thought he would never stop! But when he did, we found a couple of seats together and had a delightful visit. Bob Swanson was a man of God. From that moment we established a friendship that lasted for many years.

The next morning, after my pleasant visit with Mr. Swanson, I was taken to the railroad station where I boarded a train to return home. I went to the upper deck of a double decker and got a seat up front so I could observe all the beautiful scenery on the way. It was a most enjoyable ride back to Minnesota.

Shortly after I returned home from New York City, the pastoral committee in Flushing invited me to speak at a Presbyterian church in Huntington, Long Island, on a Wednesday evening. About twenty leaders of the Flushing church were in attendance at that service.

Afterward, when I met with the pastoral committee, we discussed a number of things including a possible call. I made it clear that I would move to Flushing only if the call was unanimous. They assured me that they would proceed accordingly. We also arranged a date for me to speak to the entire congregation at the Flushing Church prior to taking a vote.

I spoke to the congregation, and several weeks later I received a phone call informing me that they had a congregational meeting and the call was unanimous. I asked, "Was it on the first ballot?" "Well, uh, no," the gentleman replied. "It was actually the second ballot. On the first ballot we had one man who dissented and then he got up and left. But," he added, "if you knew this man, you would think the vote was unanimous!" He explained what he meant, and in the light of his explanation, Elva and I believed that it was God's will that we move to Flushing.

When we got there, I learned that the man with the negative vote was a New York policeman and a fine Christian gentleman. He and I got along very well together. But it was true that whatever was being voted on, he usually voted

opposite from the majority. Why he did that I never knew.

Some pastors remain in their church for many years, which is honorable and good. For them, that could be God's plan. But what the Lord seemed to do best through me was to send me into a church where things were moving slowly and not much was being accomplished. Then, in time, by God's direction He would use me to get things moving. God has always blessed our efforts in this type of ministry. Some of the pastorates we accepted over the course of the years had pressing needs. God used us to meet those needs, for which we are grateful.

As far as Elva and I could determine, there seemed to be a real challenge in Flushing. So once again it became packing time, which was always a big job, as most people know. Some of our furniture was old, because we had picked it up at used furniture sales during the war days. Because we could see no real value in transporting it to New York, we decided to have a sale. We put attractive prices on things but hardly anyone seemed interested.

There was a train that came into Le Roy at 3:00 p.m. daily and then went on to Austin. Shortly after the arrival of the train one day, a very kind, mature woman and her husband came to our house. I invited them in and they said, "We were on the train and saw your ad in the paper listing furniture for sale. We thought

you might have some antiques.” Because most of our furniture was old, some of the things we had were indeed antiques. The couple went all through the house picking out things until they bought practically everything we had for sale. God brought just the right people at the right time. The Lord always provides in His own way.

There was one item, however, that did not sell, and we did not want to take it to New York. We had never owned an automatic refrigerator until a few months earlier, when we invested in a new one, not knowing we were going to move. It operated on propane gas, so we knew there would be no need for it in New York. The day came for the big truck to load our furniture and belongings, and it looked as if we would be forced to take the refrigerator with us. But then, just 15 minutes before the movers were to roll it onto the truck, a man came by and bought it! God tests us sometimes, but He never fails.

The job was finished about noon, and as the truck drove away we were thankful for the driver’s promise that our furniture would arrive at our home in Flushing within 3 days.

I took Elva and the three children to Rochester and put them on a plane to New York. The next day I headed for Flushing with a friend, Merrill Jensen, one of our faithful men at the Le Roy church. He offered to go with me and help with the driving, which I gladly accepted because it was midwinter and I had been

told that the roads were covered with ice and snow most of the way. We made the trip in good time as we talked about the Lord's blessings at the church.

After spending the night in a motel in Pennsylvania, we drove on to Flushing. Merrill spent several days in New York before returning to Le Roy. He did some sightseeing, and while he was riding a crowded bus in Manhattan, a pick-pocket stole his wallet. He saw the thief but couldn't catch him in time as he jumped off the bus. Merrill said he returned home with no money but a joyful heart.

Chapter Nine

Flushing, Long Island, NY

1948–1952

Driving through New York City on my way to Flushing, I was thinking of the move from a quiet, laid-back farming community in southern Minnesota to the glamour and glitter of fast-paced New York City. What a change! But though we had moved, I also thought, *The same God who has been with us in Le Roy will still be with us in New York City.* He never changes, nor will He ever forsake us.

Already I was missing Le Roy and the slower lifestyle, as well as our farmer folks. They were indeed special people—vigorous, hard-working, and always ready to help. Having not known anything about farmers, I now had a deep appreciation for them.

God was bringing us into a totally new and different situation. Because it was His choice, I knew He would lead every step of the way, and with new enthusiasm I was ready to follow Him.

Before I left Le Roy, Elva had phoned and said she and the girls were staying in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Swanson in Flushing,

because our moving van had not yet arrived. I located the Swanson home, and after a warm and cordial greeting we enjoyed a delicious meal prepared by Mrs. Swanson. We thought our stay would be a day or so, but because it was 2 weeks before the moving van arrived we stayed much longer. The Swansons were wonderful hosts and made things as pleasant as possible for our family of five.

New York City was in the midst of a sanitation strike and the streets were cluttered with debris. Several heavy snows had fallen, which made driving quite difficult.

At breakfast one morning, Mrs. Swanson served Thomas English Muffins, a treat we had never had before. Elva enjoyed hers very much, and she asked, "May I have another one of those buns?" Mr. Swanson was quick to respond, saying, "They are not buns! They are Thomas English Muffins." He told Elva in no uncertain terms of their value, because for years he was the head of the company that supplied them.

Saturday morning the Swansons wanted to do some grocery shopping and invited us to go along. Elva chose to stay with the girls while I went to the store, even though I had a terrible headache. After an hour or so, it seemed that I also had a fever. When I told the Swansons, they thought it best that I see their doctor. The doctor met me at the house and after a careful examination he said, "You have the flu. Go to bed and

stay there until you feel better." The next day being Sunday, I said, "Oh no, I can't do that. This is my first Sunday to preach in Flushing." Smiling, he responded, "If you preach tomorrow, the wrath of God will be on you!" He continued to explain the importance of going to bed and staying there until I felt better. Accepting his advice, I did not preach on my first Sunday in Flushing.

On Wednesday, I was feeling better and I went down to the church. Eager to get started on things, I met with several folks who gave me some good information. The church in recent years had been blessed by good pastors such as Alex Sauerwine, Dr. Charles Woodbridge, and Luther Fincke, who had taught the people well. It was a privilege to follow these dedicated men of God.

After 2 weeks with the Swansons, who had been extremely gracious, the moving van finally arrived. We were taken to the newly renovated parsonage to help with the placing of the furniture. After several hours we began to live again as a family. The house was not only attractive but commodious for all our needs.

As we became active in the program of the church, we realized that in spite of all the accomplishments in the past, there were areas needing improvement. Empty pews needed to be filled. Although the church was active in supporting missionaries, there was much more to be done. The church finances needed to be increased. We readily saw that our work was cut

out for us, and we were excited about getting started, with a desire to see God work.

We hadn't been in Flushing long when I received a phone call from my father in Atlantic City, similar to the one I received several years earlier in Minnesota. He had no money and no place to live—would I help him out? Of course, we responded as before and arranged for his transportation to New York. We had several rooms on the third floor of the parsonage which we were able to get ready for Dad. We welcomed him into our home, and he was very happy to be with the children. I made the same stipulation about no alcohol as I had in Minnesota.

After several months, Dad became rather bored and wanted to get a job. We searched the newspaper together each day, and it wasn't long until we located a job for him as a night watchman over in Westchester in one of the large factories. His duties were few. After the factory closed at 5:30 p.m., he was never to allow anyone in the building, no matter who it was. They provided an apartment for Dad and it was an excellent provision by the Lord. Things worked out very well. Dad made good progress and was enjoying it.

Then one morning we received a phone call from the manager of the company, asking us to come and get Dad. He had allowed another man to enter the building during the night and they were found drinking together. Disappointed, I

went over and picked him up. On the way home I said, "Dad, you know what this means?" "Yes," was his reply. But as I continued to drive home, the Lord gave me an idea. George Bolton who directed the Bowery Mission was a man of God and a good friend. When I called him and explained our predicament, his ready response was, "Bring your father over here. We will be glad to take care of him."

Dad willingly went to meet George, and after a few weeks at the Mission he thought George Bolton was the greatest man on earth. George was not only a Christian but also a loving saint. Indeed, he was God's man for the great work at the Bowery Mission. He gave Dad good accommodations and tried to keep him active. Things went well for some time. But then again the same old problem—Dad went back to drinking. George called me and we made the arrangements to send Dad back to Atlantic City.

The next time we saw Dad was the last time. In Atlantic City while we were visiting my mother, we met him on the street. He looked very bad. Some months later, I heard that he had died. That was the sad end of a life that could have meant much for God but was wasted for the devil.

We started an early morning prayer meeting one day a week with the men of the church. It was thrilling the way the men responded and came to seek the Lord's power and blessing. You

can be sure that I felt the impact of it in the services on the Lord's Day.

Mr. Swanson, especially, was a great man of prayer. Very often, about 8 o'clock in the morning I would hear a tapping on my study door at the church. Mr. Swanson would walk in and say, "Let's have prayer, Pastor." We both would kneel and call on the Lord. He would commit me to the Lord, as well as the day ahead and its opportunities, and I would do the same for him. With a "God bless you," he was out the door and on his way to Long Island City to his work at Thomas Baking Company.

I was told that the first thing he did when he arrived at work in the morning was to go into the warehouse where they had tons of flour stored. He would take out his clean, white handkerchief, put it on the floor, and kneel and pray for all the people who would eat the bread made from the flour that day, that they might come to know the Bread of Life. We had other men on our Board like Mr. Swanson who in their own way were dedicated servants of God.

Cliff Barrows phoned me one day in the middle of the week to report that Billy Graham and he had just returned from meetings in Europe. They were in a hotel in Manhattan, and he said that Billy would be available to preach for us Sunday morning if we could use him. I told him we would be delighted to have Billy share the Word. At the time, he had not yet begun his cru-

sades but was very active with Youth for Christ.

Billy arrived at the church Sunday morning and we were all delighted to hear him. I can still recall some of the things he said. In fact, the emphasis was on how Christians, in being kind to people, can be a testimony for the Lord Jesus. After the service, Billy came to our home and had dinner with us. Elva had prepared a ham dinner. Her sister was visiting us at the time. Shortly after that, when Billy had his great Los Angeles tent meetings, Elva's sister said, "You fed Billy a ham dinner and he went on to fame!"

We had planned a special Mother's Day service to be held in the evening service. Six mothers were lined up, each to give a 5-minute talk on one of the letters in the word MOTHER. Elva was to be the last speaker. All during the previous week she kept telling me she couldn't do it because she had been very nervous and had frequent crying spells. I had never had any experience with "nerves," and regrettably I had little sympathy for her. I kept telling her, "Just snap out of it and do it, and you will be all right. You have done things like this before."

When it came time for Elva to speak, she got up and suddenly started crying. She cried and cried, and then sat down. By this time I knew something was wrong, but I didn't know what it was.

The next day we went to the doctor and got the word that she was suffering from a break-

down. He gave her a schedule of walking an hour a day, saying, "This is the best medicine you can take." It went on for almost a year, but the Lord brought her out of it.

It was just over a year later when I too began to have difficulties with "nerves" and also had frequent dizzy spells. In fact, when I preached I had to hold on to the pulpit. The doctor gave me tranquilizers, but after taking them for a week I went back to him and said, "Doc, you keep the tranquilizers and I'll keep the problem." They made me feel worse, as though my head were spinning most of the time. He responded with, "Well, you will have to do the same thing your wife did—start walking."

Together we walked each evening, when possible, for about an hour. After some time, I began to improve. I did learn, however, what I never seemed to know about "nerves." I had been so unsympathetic with Elva's case that I believe the Lord had to teach me something about the subject. Since then, I have met many people along the way, suffering from similar problems. I have much more sympathy and understanding now.

Our eldest daughter, Sherril, was in grade school. One day when she came home from school her mother asked her to take out the trash. She replied, "I don't want to take it out now." "What do you mean by that?" her mother asked. "Our teacher told us, if we don't want to do something, just refuse," she answered. When

Elva passed the word on to me, I knew that we had to do something. Our New York school system had been changing since it had been invaded by the Dewey philosophy.

I called Tom Field, a Baptist pastor, and explained the problem. We decided to get together and discuss the matter. Later, we called another Baptist pastor, James King, and the three of us decided that we needed a Christian school in Flushing.

After several more meetings with our church Board, we proceeded. We brought Mark Fakama to speak at our morning service. Mark was the National Director for the Christian School Movement at the time. In the evening he spoke at the First Baptist Church. The response from the audience was excellent.

Our church agreed to get the school started. The following year we began with first and second grades, and we had the plan to add a grade each year. We purchased a large duplex on the church's adjoining property, to be used for the housing of the school teachers. The school was highly successful and continued with all the grades through high school.

One of our Christian businessmen with vital concern for the homeless worked very closely with the Bowery Mission. He supplied the food for about three hundred homeless people every day at noon five times a week. He also preceded the lunches with a brief Gospel service. It was my

privilege to be the speaker every Friday. This was always a tremendous challenge.

Elva had a similar interest in these people who needed help so badly. She arranged to take a group of interested Christians from our church one Saturday night of each month to the Bowery Mission to conduct the service. One of our Elders did the speaking, while the others in the group participated. The group began with five, and soon there were about forty-five. The large group was divided into three smaller ones, then McAuley Mission and the Water Street Mission were added with about fifteen on each team going to each of the three missions.

God did some amazing things for us while we were at Flushing. After several years we saw excellent progress in missionary interest. Our missionary giving climbed to 65 percent of the funds received. The morning service grew to be well-attended. Regular church finances also were showing a decided increase. The Holy Spirit was moving in hearts and lives, transforming the unsaved and calling believers to complete surrender to Christ. The Lord was at work in the entire program of the church.

Following a Sunday morning service, while standing at the door and greeting worshipers as they left, two young men came by whom I had never seen before. They introduced themselves as Don Muchmore and Fred Dickason. I learned that they were both engineers, employed by the

Hazeltine Electronics Company located in Little Neck, Long Island. They expressed appreciation for the service and informed me that they would return for the evening service.

In the ensuing months, wonderful things happened in the lives of these two young men. Fred came to know Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. Don thought he had made a profession at one time but never really grew in the Lord, having been reared in a church that lacked a Bible-teaching ministry.

Both of these young men entered into our program with sincere enthusiasm. Don joined the choir and was attracted especially to the director, Eleanor Chapman. She was a delightful person, a graduate of Providence Bible Institute, an accomplished musician, and an excellent soloist.

Eventually, Don and Eleanor approached me about getting married, and shortly afterward it was my great pleasure to conduct the ceremony. They were a beautiful couple with an earnest desire to follow God's plan for their future.

Fred grew in the Lord as he studied the Word and served Him faithfully. He possessed an eagerness to know the Word of God, which later prompted him to write to the Moody Bible Institute and enroll as a student. When he completed his course at Moody, he went on to Dallas Seminary to further prepare himself to teach God's Word. He completed his training at Dallas

and later was invited to become a member of the Moody faculty, a position he held until his retirement. The Lord blessed thousands of students through the Spirit-ordained teaching ministry of Fred Dickason.

Don and Eleanor also enrolled at MBI about a year after Fred. Completing their years at Moody, they too went on to Dallas Seminary. Their hearts were set on the mission field, and after Don was graduated from Dallas they proceeded to make arrangements to go to the Congo. There in Africa, both of them taught nationals in preparation for the ministry in the Bunia Seminary, until time for their retirement.

In talking with Don recently, I learned that he and Eleanor were preparing for their 50th wedding anniversary. What a joy it has been to watch these lives mature for the Lord and then to honor Him with dedicated service for so many years.

How many there are in congregations today who are doing little for God! They could very easily surrender all to Him and invest their lives in the service of the King as these three outstanding young people did. Those who neglect to yield to Christ's control miss so much by settling on God's second-best while missing His best.

In addition to our work at the church, the Lord was giving me many opportunities throughout greater New York to serve Him. This was a new experience for me. One of the most enjoyable

ministries each summer was at Camp of the Woods in the Adirondacks, near Speculator, New York. This was and is a unique camp. At that time, it was attended by about a thousand guests every week throughout the summer.

One of the special features of the camp was the outstanding band and orchestra, composed of students from high schools and colleges from all over the country, who came to work as counselors and play in the band during the summer. I spoke on Sunday morning and evening as well as once a day, Monday through Friday. It was a challenging week. There was always an inspiring band concert on Saturday evenings.

Gordon Purdy operated the camp and had a sincere concern for the needs of young people and adults and their relationship to the Lord. Camp of the Woods was the beginning of my conference ministry, and the Lord later used this to open the door to other conferences throughout the United States and abroad.

Earlier in my ministry, as I studied the Scriptures, I had become convinced that tithing is not really a New Testament principle. It is strictly Old Testament, for there is nothing about tithing in the New Testament. If not tithing, then what standard does God offer for the church? The apostle Paul made this very clear in 1 Corinthians 16:2, when he said, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered

him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” This is the standard: “as God hath prospered.”

When people tell me they have not been prospered, I ask, “Where do you get the air to breathe? Where do you get water to drink and food to eat? This is God prospering you. He gave you children. He gave you a family. He gave you your home in which you live, and in all probability He gives you a salary. Doubtless He has given you good health. All these things come from God as He has prospered us.” How should we respond? By thanking Him, of course. But also by giving Him our thanks in a practical way. “Upon the first day of the week” we are to lay aside a goodly portion of our income as the result of being prospered by the Lord. I think of tithing as simply the beginning point of showing our appreciation to God, but certainly not the end.

My wife and I have practiced sacrificial giving to God for many years. We started back in our first pastorate. Time and time again we have added more. When we were married, we started with 10 percent, then 15 percent, and then 20 percent. And after several years, we got to the point where we honored the Lord with half of our salary, which we continue to do. I can say now that God has never failed us once in meeting all of our needs since we began. We just can’t get ahead of God in giving. I am not saying everyone must give as we give, but I am saying, “Give as God has prospered you.”

I started an Andrew Club for our men in Flushing. Every Friday evening at 7 o'clock the men of the church gathered for instructions and prayer. We then went out two by two and called on people who had visited the church, or people whose names had been given to us. At 10 p.m. we returned to the church to share our experiences. I shall never forget those times of testimony. Not only were people helped, but our own men were moved and challenged by what had taken place. More and more, a new spirit of evangelism seemed to be prevailing in the congregation. People were witnessing and sharing with friends, loved ones, and fellow employees.

It was the Easter season, and I had been invited to lower Manhattan to speak at a special church service during Holy Week. After the service, it was almost 5 o'clock, and as I started to walk to the subway to return to Flushing, I passed a pet store and was attracted by the cute little yellow chicks in the store window. I just had to get three for our three young daughters, not thinking that little chicks become large chickens. I knew our girls would be overjoyed to have those little chicks. I carried them in a ventilated box and got on the subway train headed for Flushing.

I didn't realize that three little chicks could make so much noise! I was standing in the crowded subway and people were looking my way and laughing. It became quite a joke, and it was a little embarrassing. So I put the box down

between my feet and looked around as if wondering where the sound of the chicks was coming from, as everyone else was doing.

The girls were delighted with the chicks and took good care of them until they became full-grown chickens. Then we had a problem on our hands. Of course, we could not kill and eat them, so a farmer who came to our church from out on the island each Sunday was glad to take them and give them a good home.

After five happy years in the Flushing Church, I received an invitation to consider the pulpit of the Memorial Presbyterian Church of St. Louis, Missouri, which we had visited 8 years earlier. Elva and I went to St. Louis several times to speak at the church and to meet with the Elders. We learned that this church had been known for its strong evangelistic ministry for many years.

Later, the congregation extended a call. After seeking God's plan for our future, it appeared to be God's will that we proceed. As in past experiences, we found it awfully difficult to leave the congregation we had served, and to say goodbye to the people in Flushing whom we had grown to love.

Chapter Ten

St. Louis, Missouri

1952-1956

The Memorial Presbyterian Church of St. Louis had made its mark for God throughout the city as the result of its strong evangelical ministry. Over the years, an outstanding array of Bible teachers had led the church: Dr. James Brooks, Dr. Harris Gregg, Dr. Norman B. Harrison, Rev. Russell Paynter, Dr. Frank Sneed, and Dr. Walter McClure.

I first learned of the church in my second year at Moody Bible Institute when I heard their pastor Russell Paynter speak at a graduation service. I shall never forget how he quoted many Scripture portions with the references, one after another, in his message. This made a lasting impression on me.

While I was serving in Peoria, a fellow pastor who had been in a neighboring church was called to a church in St. Louis. In preparation for his vacation one year, he wrote and asked if I would supply his pulpit for two Sundays and stay in his home while we were in St. Louis. Elva and I accepted this opportunity, and we found

St. Louis to be the hottest place we had ever known. The temperature all week long was above 100 degrees night and day. As we were leaving St. Louis for home I said to Elva, "If we get out of this place, we will never come back here again!"

Having heard Pastor Paynter at Moody, however, and while we were in St. Louis for that week, Elva and I had decided that we should go and see his church. We found it to be a large, majestic Gothic building on the corner of a busy boulevard, a block from the campus of Washington University and across the street from Forest Park—a very impressive sight. In the office, we met the secretary, Mrs. Virginia Barker, who graciously gave us a tour through the buildings. We were all eyes as we observed the magnificent facilities of this great church.

Isn't it amazing how God works? Eight years later, in the Lord's providence, I was called to be the pastor of that congregation at Memorial Presbyterian Church.

Elva and I were excited about this God-given opportunity. After moving, we plunged into the work with all the strength and wisdom we had in doing a work for God. The Lord blessed in many ways.

We hadn't been at Memorial very long until we discovered that the larger the church, the more multiplied and complex the problems were. Many of the people told us about difficult situations, which we tried our best to help solve.

One of the problems in the church concerned the music ministry, which was high-scale religious music but lacked evangelical appeal. In my thinking, the paid quartet, along with the choir, did not have the impact an evangelical church should have.

I met with the Trustees, explained my disappointment, and offered a solution. I suggested that instead of the paid quartet, which sang only on Sunday mornings, we could use the money to hire a qualified music director who would not only be a soloist himself but would be able to train a good choir and develop other choirs for the youth and the children. The Trustees responded favorably to this idea and asked me to begin a search for a man to fill this position.

Ultimately, through the leading of the Lord, we called Clair Hess to be our director of music. Clair and his wife Dorothy came with their three young daughters, and he did an excellent work. Everyone was pleased with Clair's ministry, for he was an accomplished tenor soloist and a gifted choir director. His music became a great blessing to the church. He and his wife were delightful people and a tremendous asset to our church. With Clair, God solved our music problem in a marvelous way.

Memorial had one of the most practical and useful study locations for the pastor I have ever seen. It was in the high tower of the church, secluded from everyone and very conducive for

quiet reflection and intensive sermon preparation. The other church offices were located on the first floor. When the pastor went to his study, he was guaranteed unbroken privacy, which is needed if he is to have worthwhile messages. There were no interruptions except for emergencies. All phone calls for the pastor were delayed until 11:30 a.m. each day.

I had always been diligent in keeping regular study hours from 8 until noon, Monday through Friday. Most of my messages were dictated and then typed several weeks before the time of delivery. Afterward, I memorized them to the extent that I could preach without notes. I had learned how to memorize very quickly. In fact, I could memorize an entire message in 30 minutes at the most.

I must give my wife the credit for my confidence to preach without notes. In our first pastorate in Peoria, I carried copious notes into the pulpit and usually looked at the notes more than I looked at the people. Elva said she thought I could do better than this. She encouraged me to try to memorize my messages and look at the people as I preached. I didn't think I could do it and refused to try. But one day she said, "If you don't try, I am going to steal your notes on Saturday night and you will be in real trouble." With that, I thought I had better try. After a little stumbling the first couple of times, it worked out well.

I remembered the admonition one of our professors at Moody gave. Dr. P. B. Fitzwater, instructing the young preachers, said, "When you preach, stand up straight, look the people in the eye, and give it to them!" After I began to preach without notes, I never went back to them. I "stood up straight, looked the people in the eye, and gave it to them!" I heartily recommend this to all young preachers.

This is not to reflect negatively on the preachers who use notes. Some can do it very well, but I couldn't. I felt much more secure in the pulpit after I had my message in my heart and head, and not just on paper.

While I was preaching verse by verse on the epistle to the Philippians at Memorial, some of our members encouraged me to put these messages in print. I hesitated for some time but finally decided to go ahead, and after some additional work I finally completed my first book.

On contacting several publishers, I discovered that it was not easy to find someone who would readily accept the manuscript, especially the first one. After several tries, I located an interested publisher, the Loizeaux Brothers, Inc. Elie Loizeaux and Marie, his sister, were very kind and understanding. They decided to take a chance and publish the first of my books, which would become known as the "Living Series," with the title *Living Victoriously*. The book went well, and a year or so later I wrote another on the 23rd

Psalm and called it *Living Reliantly*, also published by Loizeaux Brothers, Inc. I was encouraged to keep on writing, which I continued to do over the ensuing years. This provided several more opportunities to spread the truth in a whole new area, with all the profits from the sales of the books going to missions.

The St. Louis church was blessed with many young Christian couples, but they were not being used in the program of the church. Elva and I had a special burden for these young couples in their late thirties and early forties who needed to take responsibility and an active part in the church. We helped them to organize and then started a well-attended and active young couples fellowship. We were able to get some of them on the Board of Elders and in other places of leadership. Things changed greatly in the church. But unfortunately, some of the older leaders thought they were being pushed aside as younger ones moved in to serve.

The young couples brought new life and interest to the church. It was thrilling to see how they responded. Some of the more zealous couples wanted to start a branch church in one of the needy areas of the city. Five thousand dollars was laid aside in readiness to begin such a project if God should open the door. We appealed to the local Presbytery for their permission to start another church in the area. Their decision was that another church wasn't needed

in St. Louis. I learned later from one of the other pastors that their decision was really that they didn't want another evangelical church like Memorial in St. Louis.

Several years later, some of the young couples started an independent church on their own, known as the Brentwood Bible Church, which grew and did a great work for God in the Brentwood neighborhood of St. Louis.

We saw remarkable growth at Memorial, especially in the realm of worldwide evangelization. Our family led the advance by assuming the full support of a missionary ourselves. Other people in the congregation did the same and before long 75 percent of the church's income was designated to missions, leaving 25 percent, which adequately covered the church's expenses. God was doing "great and mighty things" as He promised in His Word. The attendance had multiplied in both the morning and evening services.

This was in the days before large buildings could be air-conditioned practically and inexpensively. So because of the intense summer heat in St. Louis, we decided to move our evening service out on the large lawn next to the busy boulevard. The attendance grew to about four hundred, even on hot Sunday evenings. Our young couples engineered the entire move each week, carrying all the chairs out and even moving a large electric organ outside.

God changed the whole atmosphere of the church. He was working in a wonderful way. More important than the financial growth and the numerical growth were the lives that were being changed by the power of God. The young people, the young adults, the middle-aged, and the mature adults were all growing in the Lord, for which we give all praise to Him.

It was in St. Louis that I began to feel a burden for Christian radio. I realized that we were reaching people within the bounds of the church walls, but outside there were millions who needed the Word of God. I talked with some of our men and they agreed that we should do something about it. So I contacted several radio stations and was able to buy two spots. KSTL had a Sunday afternoon half-hour time available to re-broadcast our Sunday morning sermon which we called The Memorial Hour. This not only helped us to reach many more people, but at the same time the Lord brought new people into the church as the result of the broadcast. We also purchased time on station WIL for Sunday evenings, which allowed us to do a live broadcast in the studio after our evening service.

In addition to my ministry at Memorial, I had opportunities to speak at other churches and in conferences. I spent the entire 6 weeks of my vacation in summer Bible conferences. Later, the church allowed me to take 1 week each month of the year to be away in other

churches and conferences. I was invited to Moody Bible Institute's Founder's Week several times, and many times I spoke at Camp of the Woods, Winona Lake, Maranatha Bible Conference, Gull Lake Bible Conference, Canadian Keswick, Southern Keswick, Ben Lippen, and others. The Bible conference ministry was a new challenge God had given me while I was the pastor at Memorial.

For some time, I had been driving a Ford which was old and had many miles on it. One morning, I got in my car to drive to my study at the church and spend the morning working on a message. After I started the car, I realized it was running on only about four of the eight cylinders. So I drove to the Ford agency and had the service manager look at it. After checking it over, he came to me and said, "Sir, you have a cracked block." I knew some people thought that, but I never had anyone come right out and tell me! "What does that involve?" I asked. He said, "You have water in your cylinders, which means you will need a new motor or a rebuilt one." I asked, "Can I run it for a while?" He said, "I'll put a sealant in your radiator and that will hold you temporarily, but don't plan on it too long."

When I arrived at the church, I phoned Elva and explained the situation. I knew that we didn't have the money to handle the cost of a new motor or even a rebuilt motor. When I said to Elva, "What are we going to do?" she an-

swered with one word, "Pray!" We agreed that we wouldn't tell anybody about the need but simply pray and trust God. We also decided to drive the car as long as it would run.

Several days later, I was scheduled to attend a meeting with one of the medical doctors who attended Memorial. He picked me up, and along the way he asked, of all questions, "How is your car running?" I said, "Well, we hadn't shared this with anyone, but as long as you asked . . ." Then I proceeded to tell him the situation. "Well," he said, "as you know, my wife is an obstetrician. And because she must get up any time of the night to go to the hospital, she needs dependable transportation. She has a Chrysler with 23,000 miles on it, and as soon as we can locate the new car she wants, we will take the Ford off your hands and give you the Chrysler." "Praise the Lord!" was my response.

Several weeks later he phoned me and said, "The Chrysler is ready. You can have it if you can come down to my office."

"If I can come down to your office?!" I exclaimed. "I will be there just as soon as my Ford can get me there!"

When I arrived, I found the car parked in front of his office, cleaned and polished. He said, "The two front tires were worn a little, so I put two new ones on and now it is ready to go." I got in the Chrysler and drove home in style. In fact, when I arrived home, I asked Elva to get in and

we drove all around our neighborhood, hoping the neighbors would see us! (Ha!) It was a beautiful car. No car we ever had could compare with that Chrysler. We drove it for several years.

One Saturday night I was on my way to speak at an InterVarsity Christian Fellowship Conference for young people, which was about 75 miles from St. Louis. Four nurses from the church were riding with me as we drove to this meeting. It was a terrible night with heavy rain and strong winds.

We were about halfway to the conference when we went around a curve and all the traffic was stopped. I jammed on my brakes and was able to stop several feet from the car ahead of me. The car behind me came around the curve and slammed into the rear end of the Chrysler. It looked like an accordion. The girls were not hurt but I had a painful whiplash. We could still drive the car slowly, so we continued on to the conference. Sunday afternoon we drove home and I had the car checked on Monday. The report was: "Beyond repair!" Regrettably, that was the end of the Chrysler.

Shortly after the Chrysler was totaled, I had a meeting scheduled in Toronto at the Calvary Baptist Church. While there, the young associate pastor who had come from the States told me he needed to sell his car. He couldn't afford to keep it. It was a nice-looking Pontiac with low mileage. Before the week ended, I bought the Pontiac. I was

so anxious to drive the car home that I left after the Sunday evening service in Toronto to drive to St. Louis.

When I reached the border, the police had to check on the car because it had entered Canada with another owner. I was told to go into the office and wait. While checking, the police found that the assistant pastor had a trailer attached when he drove the car into Canada. The police asked me, "Where is the trailer?" I explained that I knew nothing about the trailer. The police phoned the assistant pastor and found that he still had the trailer.

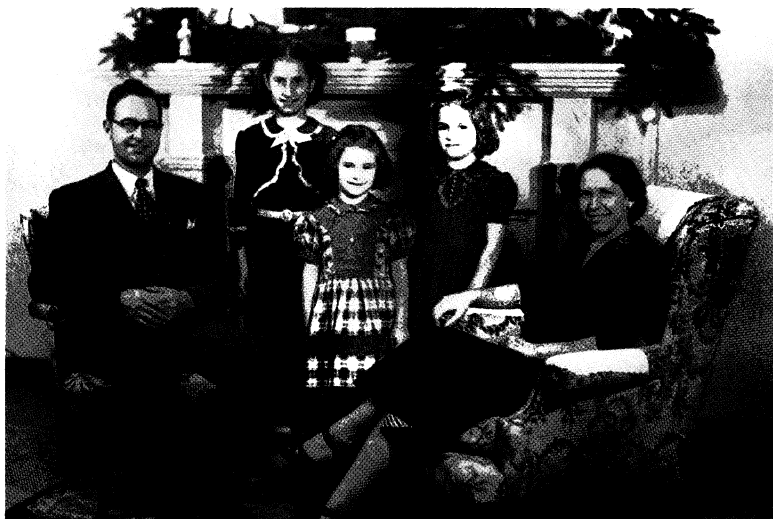
It was 3 o'clock in the morning when I finally got out of customs and on my way back to St. Louis. When I arrived home later that day, we had prayer, thanking the Lord for the car, and again I took the family for a ride. This was another wonderful provision of the Lord, which we enjoyed for many, many miles. As He always does, God met our every need.

It was early in 1953 when I received a letter from Dr. V. Raymond Edman, who at the time was president of Wheaton College, informing me that they had observed my ministry over recent years and decided to honor me with a Doctor of Divinity Degree at graduation in June. Elva and I were delighted to attend the graduation, where I received the honorary degree.

I had wanted to attend Wheaton after my graduation from Moody, but not having enough

money I knew it was out of the question. Now God had chosen to grant me a relationship with Wheaton College. How good the Lord is!

Our two younger daughters, Judy and Cindy, were traveling with me for about 4 weeks one summer as I spoke at Bible Conferences. We were on our way to Camp of the Woods in New York State where Elva was working for the summer as camp hostess. Our eldest daughter, Sherril, was with her.



Allen and Elva
with Sherril, Judy, and Cindy

As we passed through Amsterdam, New York, Judy said, "Daddy, we are almost out of gas." I looked at the gas gauge and it read "empty." When I turned in to a gas station to fill

the tank, I noticed at the same time that a new Chrysler pulled up on the other side of the pump. I saw on the license the name Gehman Brothers, and I remembered that the Gehman Brothers operated a large Chrysler Plymouth dealership near Allentown, Pennsylvania.

I had recently spoken at a conference for the Bible Fellowship Church at a camp near Allentown and was told that Mr. Kermit Gehman of Gehman's Dealership had been there every night. I wanted to meet him but didn't have an opportunity. Mr. Gehman was vitally interested in missions, and I was interested in knowing any laymen who had a vision for missions.

As the owner of the Chrysler came back to fill his tank, I assumed that he had purchased his car from Mr. Gehman, so I said, "Gehman Brothers, huh?" And he replied, "That's right."

"I know Mr. Gehman," I continued.

"You do?" He said. I am Kermit Gehman." I looked for a hole to crawl into, but there was none. So we laughed and shook hands. I learned that Mr. Gehman was on his way to Word of Life Bible Conference for a meeting as one of the Board members.

As I drove on to Camp of the Woods, I realized how important it is to distinguish between knowing *about* a person and *knowing* him personally. Many people speak of knowing Christ, when actually what they mean is they know *about* Christ, for they have never met Him and do

not know what it means to have a personal relationship with Him.

For quite some time I had been thinking of the possibility of a fulltime Bible Conference ministry. As invitations for meetings continued to arrive, Elva and I decided that it was time to give serious thought and prayer to the subject.

Having served the Lord in pastorates for almost 20 years and now in my early forties, it seemed the ideal time. Of course, we knew it would not be easy being away from home and the family, with constant travel and motel living. However, if this was the leading of the Lord, it was what we wanted to do.

As we continued to pray, the Lord began to show us very clearly that this was His move and we must proceed. After we were sure, I discussed it with our Board of Elders. Though they expressed disappointment, they promised to pray and support our plans in every way possible.

We knew it would be hard to leave our people at Memorial, especially the young couples. They had been so good to us in many ways. Of course, over the years since then, many have gone home to be with the Lord but some of the others keep in touch.

More and more, as we considered the events that were taking place around us, the inner awareness of the Lord's leading became more clear, and we proceeded to make plans. I resigned as pastor of Memorial and shortly

after that we moved out of the parsonage into temporary housing and the new traveling ministry began.

When I told our music director Clair Hess that I planned to leave Memorial, he replied, "If you are leaving, I am too." I hated to lose Clair, for he was such a valuable worker and had a sincere love for the Lord. Later he moved to the West Coast to work with a well-known broadcaster, and in time he became music and publications director for the Radio Bible Class in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Mrs. Barker, who had been my faithful secretary, chose to leave the church to be a missionary in New Guinea. She continued to use her gracious interest in people and her literary skills. Now with the Lord, she had been a great help to me and many others.

Chapter Eleven

St. Louis, Missouri

Traveling Ministry

1956–1959

After we left Memorial, the Lord used Dr. and Mrs. Ernest Younger, both medical doctors, to provide temporary housing for us in the nearby town of Fenton, Missouri. Our family lived there very comfortably until we were able to locate a home of our own.

Shortly afterward, the same couple came to see us with a burden for the radio ministry which we had when we were at Memorial. "How much would it take for you to get back on radio?" the husband asked. I told him it would take about \$1,000 to buy broadcasting equipment and about \$1,000 to buy the radio time for one month on the stations we had been on. "Good!" he replied. We have \$2,000 we want to put into God's work." That was our green light, and we were able to get back on about 13 of the 17 stations that had formerly carried the program.

As I traveled fulltime for the next 3 years, from east to west and north to south, in churches and conference centers, I was able to stimulate

additional interest in the program. Also, some of the people in the places where I ministered chose to support the program on their local stations. We were soon on about 65 outlets.

For some months, Elva and I were disturbed about the liberalism in our denomination, which seemed to be getting worse. After much prayer, we felt that we should resign and become independent. Soon we took the step of faith and have never regretted that decision.

The first meeting I had scheduled after leaving Memorial was a conference for missionaries in South America. I had to leave home the week before Christmas and had to be away for a month. It was difficult to be away from the family at that special season. The evening I was to leave, Elva prepared a lovely Christmas dinner which we all enjoyed. We then left for the airport.

My flight was an excursion and stopped at all the capital cities in Latin America. This was very enlightening to me, because I had never been out of the country before. I got off the flight in Costa Rica and spent several days with the missionaries our family was helping to support, George and Mary Gay.

The first morning before we went out, George said, "You will be meeting some of our Costa Rican friends along the way, and when you do, you will need to know several words in Spanish. When you are introduced, you should say, '*Mucho gusto*,' and when you leave them,

you say, '*Hasta luego.*'" We took a short walk to see several sights of importance and met two young Christians with whom George conversed. He introduced me and I said, "*Mucho gusto,*" and when we left I said, "*Hasta luego.*" At that point the young friends smiled and said something to George in Spanish. Later, George told me they said, "If he knows Spanish, he had better do some brushing up!"

At the end of my time with George and Mary Gay, I flew to Panama, where I was met by Lester James "Dutch" Soerheide, a missionary with the Latin America Mission. He had arranged that I stay in the Officers' Quarters on a U.S. military base. The next day we went to a chapel service on the base. In the afternoon I boarded a flight to Barranquilla, Colombia, where I met other missionaries. Together we drove to Cartagena, stopping for a supper of fried bananas with catsup at a grass hut on the roadside. At the conference location we met behind locked doors, because Colombia was closed to missionary efforts at that time. We had a great time of rejoicing and praising God.

Missionary living was a new experience for me. I had to go to a little hut down by the river, get a bucket of water out of the river and pour it on myself in the little hut for a shower. It was so hot and humid, I didn't know whether I was drying my sweat or the water from the bucket. I slept in a hammock at night. I surely did miss

my Serta! The entire trip was not only a new experience but a great experience. I returned home with a deeper appreciation and concern for missionaries than ever before.

On another visit to Costa Rica, Elva was able to go with me. George Gay took us to the mountains to visit an orphanage where there were about 40 children. Our hearts rejoiced when we saw the wonderful care the children received in that Christian orphanage because of the dedicated missionaries and because the Lord's people at home supported it so generously.

It was exciting to see a young nurse there whom I remembered from a camp in West Virginia about 10 years earlier. After hearing one of my messages, she had turned her life over to the Lord to be a missionary. How happy we were to see her serving the Lord at this orphanage! She showed us her small infirmary, which had an antique dentist chair where her patients sat as she ministered to their needs. It had been sent to her by Christians in the States.

Elva and I were special guests at the orphanage that day, and we were honored to have the privilege of giving the children their daily dose of medicine. They lined up outside in a single line. We were asked to give each one a tablespoon of the clear liquid. Whatever it was, each child took it with a smile.

While we were living in Fenton, Missouri, in the home that had been graciously loaned to

us, Elva was busy looking for a small home we might buy in St. Louis. We didn't have much money, but I had received my pension from the Presbyterian Church for the 15 years I was in the denomination. It amounted to about \$1,000, and we planned to use this toward a down payment if we could find a house within our means.

When I arrived at the airport, having returned from a meeting, Elva and our daughter Sherril met me. Elva was excited that she had found a house, and she asked if we might drive by and take a look at it. The location was a new area with about a dozen other new homes. The builder lived in one of them, which was a good recommendation. We were shown through the house and it seemed to be ideal for our need. The price was also within our range.

Because loan rates were very high at the time, we contacted a few of our faithful helpers in Flushing who had been good friends while we were there. We asked if they could afford to lend us some money that we would pay back systematically. Two families responded. Each lent us about \$5,000. One of the loans had no interest and the folks held my life insurance as collateral. The other family needed 4 percent, which was about half of the going rate.

We borrowed the money and bought the home. It had three small bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, and a study. I moved my desk, files, and recording equipment into the study.

Elva moved her desk into the kitchen, where she set up as the secretary of *Glad Tidings*. We lived there until we moved to Charlotte. It was comfortable for our needs in every respect. It was the first home we had ever owned.

I had been invited to Lincoln, Nebraska, to speak at the annual Spiritual Emphasis week at the Lincoln Air Force Base. When I arrived, the evangelical Chaplain who invited me met me at the airport. While riding to the base, he said, "I have some bad news for you." "What's that?" I asked. He then told me he was being shipped out Monday morning. He added, "There are two other chaplains who are supposed to work with you, but they will not give you much cooperation."

The Sunday morning service was well attended. The chapel was full. Eight airmen came forward to receive Christ. But the rest of the meetings were very poorly attended. Each night I preached and shared God's Word with the men. I gave an invitation following each message but there was no response. The meetings were extremely discouraging and I couldn't wait for the week to end.

When I arrived home, Elva met me at the airport as she always did and asked, "How was it?" "Don't even ask," I said. "I'm trying to forget it. It was the worst flop I was ever in." I told her what happened and we let it drop.

Eight years later at a Bible Conference in Allentown, Pennsylvania, I was the Bible teacher

and Horace Fenton from the Latin America Mission was the missionary speaker. We were rooming next-door to each other in a building on the conference grounds. One day as we were talking, he said, "By the way, Allen, did you ever hear from a young fellow by the name of Dave Dawson?" I said, "No." He went on to say, "I had an unusual experience. I was flying up from South America. We touched down in Jamaica and the man next to me got off. A young fellow came over and said, 'Aren't you Horace Fenton?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'I recognized you from your picture. Do you mind if I sit with you?'"

As they talked, Horace learned that the young man was with the Navigators. Horace asked him how he came to know Christ. "Well," he said, "I was stationed at the Lincoln Air Force Base. I was living in sin, carousing, and getting drunk. In fact, I was at the end of my rope, about to be court-martialed. There was a Spiritual Emphasis Week at the base. I went to the Sunday morning meeting. A young fellow by the name of Allen Blair preached. When He gave the invitation, I went forward and God changed my life. When I got out of the Air Force, I got my Bible training and lined up with the Navigators. I've been with them ever since."

After Horace told me about Dave Dawson, I went to my room, got down on my knees, and said, "Lord, I apologize. I asked you to bless that meeting and I've been saying it was the worst flop

I was ever in.” I then promised the Lord I would never call a meeting a flop again, even if there weren’t any people present! God has His plan. He knows what He is doing. The Holy Spirit honors His Word.

Dave Dawson is best known today for his Equipping the Saints Ministry. He has prepared a series of excellent discipleship training materials, which have been translated into many languages and are being used by pastors and lay people throughout the world.

I arrived at the Pittsburgh airport about 10 o’clock on a Saturday night in preparation for a series of meetings in an area church. I had been there several times before and the pastor always met me. I was surprised when, instead of the pastor, I saw a couple from the church. I inquired about the pastor and they told me he was involved in a special meeting at the church with the members of his Board.

My meeting was to begin on Sunday and continue through Friday night for the purpose of dedicating their new sanctuary, which had never yet been used. It was almost midnight when we reached the town and the folks wanted to show me their new church. It was beautiful, all lighted up with spotlights.

As we drove by the church, our driver remarked, “Oh, I see the study light is still on. Evidently, the meeting is continuing.” I began to wonder. *Saturday night, a Board meeting, run-*

ning until midnight? Something must be wrong. I found out that it certainly was!

Early the next morning the pastor called and asked if he could see me at about 8 o'clock. He came to my motel room and unloaded his heart. His younger brother, who was a very outgoing gentleman, was a member of the church. He and his followers had a conflict with his brother, the pastor, and they were doing their best to get him out of the church.

Here were two Christian brothers from the same family at enmity with each other. To make matters worse, the father of the two men was on the church Board, and the members had voted to keep the pastor's brother and his loyal following out of the church. The next morning the brother and his followers came to the church service and sat down in the front, in spite of the action of the Board. The whole church was in turmoil. The sanctuary was beautiful on the outside, but it appeared to be a hopeless wreck on the inside.

I preached the message I had planned to give. There was so much stress in the congregation, I doubt that most of the people knew anything I said. After lunch I was taken back to my motel room. There I got down on my knees and said, "Lord, what shall I do? Shall I pack up and return home? Or do you have some plan for me?" I prayed on until I finally got the answer. It seemed very clear that God wanted me to stay and speak on the Holy Spirit, who is never di-

vided. I spoke in the evening service on the unity of the Spirit.

After I finished speaking, I sat down. The pastor got up and said, "God has spoken to my heart tonight. I have made mistakes and I apologize to everyone." Then he said, "I am asking my brother to meet me in my study immediately. I want to make things right." Both men walked out and went to the pastor's study. There was complete silence in the auditorium. No one made a move.

After a pause, I announced a hymn and we sang, and then we prayed. We continued to sing. And after about 30 minutes the two men returned with their arms around each other, brought together in the love of God. The pastor's brother offered his apology and made some other comments. After the meeting was dismissed with prayer, the people went to each other, hugged, and apologized for their feelings, and revival was on. People left very slowly.

It was about 10 o'clock when I said to the pastor, "Isn't it too bad we didn't have a prayer meeting and all get on our knees and thank God." He said, "It isn't too late." He looked around and got a few helpers to go to the phones and call all the people who left, asking them to come back. We had a prayer meeting that went far into the night. It was the first time I had ever been in such a meeting.

The remainder of the week was not as I

had expected it to be. What a pouring out of the Holy Spirit of God! Not only was the sanctuary dedicated to the Lord, but many lives in the church were rededicated to Him. It was a week I shall always remember. God made the words in Isaiah 59:1 very clear to me: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear." God is always ready to hear and bless His people.

I was closing a week of meetings at a church in Knoxville, Tennessee, on a Sunday night, giving a missionary challenge to young people. Toward the end of my message, a young woman got up, stomped out, and let the door slam. Naturally, I wondered what was wrong. What did I say? I continued to give the appeal to youth, to which some responded.

At the end of the service after everyone had left the church, the pastor and I were in the auditorium talking. The young woman who had walked out returned and came up to us. Her eyes were red from crying. She said, "I have come to offer my life to be a missionary." Then she told us how she had been fighting the missionary call and that she had become angry during the service as she tried to resist. She said she had gone to a nearby park and paced back and forth, praying as she tried to get the anger out of her heart.

Deeply convicted, she was now returning to give in to God. At the time, this woman, whose

name was Carolyn Stout, was employed as a medical technician. Soon after this experience she returned to school to prepare to go the mission field. Later, she joined Gospel Recordings and traveled throughout Europe on behalf of the Mission and was greatly used of God. She worked faithfully for many years as a devoted servant of the Lord. Though she is retired now, she is a faithful witness to God's grace.

There are many in our day to whom God has spoken who are fighting the missionary call. They know what God wants them to do, but the appeal of money, family, convenience, and an easy life seems to be too much for them. They are missing so much.

I was at home a few days before my next meeting, and while I was shaving I noticed some hard lumps in my neck. I went to one of our doctors who was a faithful member of Memorial. After examining me thoroughly, he was not ready to give a final answer without x-rays. He thought it could be leukemia or Hodgkin's disease. He sent me to another of our Memorial doctors who was a well-known radiologist to get his diagnosis. He likewise was not sure what it was. Over the next few months I continued to travel, but when I was home I had some biopsies taken, and still there was no final answer.

Between the two times of my biopsies, I had a series of meetings in Buffalo, New York. On our flight I learned that there was a severe bliz-

zard in the Buffalo area. When our pilot was attempting to land at the Buffalo airport, he had to make three separate approaches. On the first two, he was blown off the course and had to circle again and try the third time. When he finally landed in the snow after the third try, everybody on the plane cheered and applauded. It was good to get on terra firma again.

During the week, about 2 feet of snow covered the ground. I stayed in a hotel, and other than going to the meetings each night I was pretty much kept in my room all day long because of the snow. I shall never forget one Saturday night when there was no meeting. I sat in my room and tried to study, but the devil seemed to be there with all his emissaries. I was thinking of the possibilities of my condition of either leukemia or Hodgkin's disease leading to the end of my life and ministry. I didn't want to leave my family—three young girls, and a wonderful wife.

As I continued to worry and think, the Lord directed me to His Word. When I opened my Bible, what did I see? Psalm 118:17-18, "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but He hath not given me over unto death." I praised God and thanked Him for His message from the Word.

I called my wife and said, "I have good news. I am not going to die!" "How do you know?" she asked. I told her what had hap-

pened, then I read the verse to her and we thanked the Lord together. Once again, Satan was defeated, God gave victory, and I had peace.

After returning home, I had another biopsy. When I visited the surgeon for the results, he said, "Well, the biopsy doesn't tell us anything we need to know." "So," I asked, "what shall I do now?" He said, "Well, Reverend, the only advice I can give is the same thing the rest of us do—live a day at a time." That was quite a rebuke for a preacher, but I needed that message.

About 3 months later, I had meetings scheduled in my former church near Rochester, Minnesota, where the famous Mayo Clinic is located. Since my physical situation had not changed, I phoned a good friend who was an elder in the Le Roy church, and he arranged an appointment for me to go through the Clinic while I was in the vicinity. I spent almost a week there and was examined thoroughly.

At the end of the week, the doctor who gave me the final report said, "We checked the x-rays that were sent to us when you came, and we looked at the x-rays taken since you came here. There are no signs of what you had previously." He advised me to "Go home and enjoy life." Here was a miraculous healing by God. I phoned my wife and assured her that all was well and together we gave praise to God.

We often find that Satan tries to confuse and hinder us, but God always intervenes. I con-

tinued having a wonderful time proclaiming the truth throughout the United States, as well as in Canada, Central and South America, Bermuda, and France.

The new radio program was growing rapidly. The Lord gave us the name of *Glad Tidings*, taken from Romans 10:15. "And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

With the exception of my speaking and answering letters, all the rest of the radio work was handled by volunteers who had the same burden Elva and I had—to spread the truth of God's Word.

It was after about 3 years in the traveling ministry that I had meetings in the Westover Presbyterian Church located in Greensboro, North Carolina. In one of the evening services, when I walked up on the platform I saw a pew full of people near the front of the church. I recognized several of them from visits I had made to the Ben Lippen Bible Conference in Asheville, North Carolina.

I learned afterward that this was a pulpit committee from Calvary Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Among those on the committee were Billy Graham's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Graham. Mr. Graham was the spokesman for the group. He told me about their

church and wondered if I would consider being the pastor, to which I replied, "I have a ministry which I don't think God would want changed. So I must say, I am not interested."

Mr. Graham said further, "Would you come and preach for us sometime?" "I would be glad to do that," I told him, "but not as a candidate." Several weeks later I had a free Sunday and Elva and I went to Charlotte. We enjoyed our visit with the folks at Calvary, and while we were there several of the Board members spoke to me again about coming as pastor, but I gave the same reply as before.

As we left, we thought that would be the end of Calvary's interest. But in spite of our refusal, I received a letter from the Charlotte congregation informing us that they had met and voted on me as their pastor and extended a call. Quite surprised, I wrote and declined the call.

Six months later, Elva and I were in Toronto, Canada, where I was scheduled to preach at the Knox Presbyterian Church for 6 Sundays while the pastor was on vacation.

While there, we received a phone call from the assistant pastor at Calvary, who was in town visiting his mother. We invited him to visit us at our apartment. When I asked if they had gotten a pastor at Calvary, he said, "Yes, we just called a young man." I asked, "Do you mind telling me his name?" "Not at all," he replied, "his name is J. Allen Blair." I asked, "What do you mean?" He

said, "Mr. Frank Graham stood up in a congregational meeting and said, 'God told me that Blair is coming, so let's all keep praying.'"

Elva and I had never faced anything like this before. We began to discuss the matter at length, thinking maybe God had a plan for us we did not understand. The more we thought and prayed, the more we realized that we should give it more consideration.

Calvary contacted us again and invited us to come to Charlotte for another Sunday, which we accepted. In the afternoon we met with the Elder Board and Pulpit Committee, and again I told them of the radio broadcast and also how I felt obligated to continue to accept invitations to churches and conferences. They graciously offered us the opportunity of continuing the radio ministry and to take one meeting a month as I had done at Memorial. Every detail was covered satisfactorily. We considered this to be God's will and provision, so we proceeded to make plans to become the pastor of the Calvary Presbyterian Church.

After living in St. Louis 8 years, we got ready to move to Charlotte. Early on a Saturday morning, with Elva, my mother-in-law, our three daughters, our dog, and our canary, we drove to Paducah, Kentucky, where I preached on Sunday. Then on Monday morning we continued on to North Carolina and arrived in Charlotte late in the afternoon.



Dr. and Mrs. Blair
with children and grandchildren

Chapter Twelve

Charlotte, North Carolina

Calvary Church
1959-1967

When we arrived at the parsonage in Charlotte, we found it beautifully renovated. There were even several pieces of new furniture in the living room which had been given by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Graham to welcome us.

Calvary was a body of concerned believers who had withdrawn from the Tenth Avenue Presbyterian Church about 20 years earlier and had begun an independent work. There was so much denominationalism in Charlotte at the time that the members felt it would be to their advantage to keep Presbyterian in the title.

Dr. Dexter McClenny was my predecessor and did a splendid work, especially among the young people. He moved to Wheaton, Illinois, to become the pastor of the Wheaton College church.

During my first week at the church, I conducted the funeral of Grady Wilson's mother, who had been a faithful member of Calvary. Billy Graham was there along with other mem-

bers and friends of the Billy Graham Team. Jimmy Johnson, the evangelist, and about six other Christian leaders all spoke briefly.

Billy was always very good to his parents and came down from Montreat to visit them regularly. Often he came to worship with us on the Lord's Day. Learning of my radio ministry, he expressed a sincere interest in what I was doing and offered to send his radio men to analyze our program and give me some helpful advice. In addition to this, he placed our program on his station in Black Mountain, and our broadcast was heard there for many years.

Two of Billy's radio men, Fred Dienert and Walter Bennett, came to see me the next week. Fred was from Philadelphia and Walter was from Chicago. We discussed the ministry at length and they took a copy of our tapes with them to analyze.

About a week later, Mr. Dienert phoned and said, "What are you doing? Using a 15-minute format once a week is not enough. That kind of thing is impossible!" I explained that God had blessed—after beginning with 17 stations, we now were on 65. "Well," said Mr. Dienert, "if you are having success with an *impossible* thing, think what would happen if you did a *possible* thing!" That sounded reasonable, so I kept quiet and listened. He suggested that either I broadcast 30 minutes once a week or 15 minutes daily, Monday through Friday.

After several weeks of prayer, we chose the daily broadcast 5 days a week. Because of finances, it was necessary to cut back considerably to about ten stations for the simple reason that it costs much more on a station 5 days a week than it does for 1 day.

Mr. Dienert was able to get us on WBT in Charlotte each evening 5 nights a week. We broadcast at that time for 10 years, until a new sales manager came and removed all religion. Being on WBT, a 50,000-watt station reaching from Montreal to Cuba in the evening, was a tremendous impetus to our program. God established *Glad Tidings* in a marvelous way. Later, when the Bible Broadcasting Network came into existence, they placed our program on their network, which helped to expand our outreach.

I found Calvary to be a distinct ministry, a strong, evangelical body of believers to which evangelical organizations looked for help in their early years. The other churches in the area were primarily denominational at the time, supporting only their own denominational ministries.

Calvary was known for its Bible teaching. While there, I gave a number of Bible book studies from the pulpit, which were later put into book form and added to the *Living Series*. Thousands of these books are still being sold, for which we give thanks to the Lord.

As at Memorial in St. Louis, our mission funds at Calvary grew and more missionaries

were added. Lives were deepened and there was a wonderful spirit prevailing in this happy body of believers.

About a year after my mother divorced my dad, Elva and I tried persistently to get her to move to North Carolina and live with us. Having spent most of her life in Atlantic City, this did not appeal to her at all. Practically every time I phoned, I would say, "We wish you would come down and live with us." But always the refusal.

One night, however, when I called, I invited her again and she seemed to be softening on my request. Finally she said, "I think I might come to North Carolina." I explained that I had a week of meetings in Pittsburgh the following week, and if she was willing I would fly to Atlantic City at the conclusion of the meetings on Saturday, rent a station wagon, and bring her down with some of her needed belongings.

I followed through on my plans and filled the station wagon with furniture, clothing, and all she desired to bring. We drove to Charlotte the next day, where we had a comfortable room ready for her and moved everything in.

For 2 weeks, Mother was dissatisfied. She was homesick for Atlantic City. Most of all, she was not altogether pleased with our Christian lifestyle. At the end of the 2 weeks she said, "I want to go back home." She would not listen to any reasoning. So the next day, being Saturday, I rented another station wagon, packed all her

belongings again, and our youngest daughter Cindy went with us as we headed for Atlantic City. We arrived in good time, and after getting Mother settled we started back to Charlotte. After driving several hundred miles, we took a motel for the night and continued on home the next day. We kept in touch with Mother, and we learned not many months later that she was diagnosed with colon cancer. She had surgery, and as soon as we could arrange our schedule we went to Atlantic City to visit her in the hospital. She seemed to be doing well and in fairly good spirits. Then we returned to Charlotte.

A few months later, I was in a series of meetings in southern Illinois, and while there I received word that she had died. A graveside service was scheduled for the following Saturday.

At the conclusion of the meetings on Friday night, I boarded a plane for St. Louis, where I got a connection to Atlantic City early Saturday morning. I rented a car at the airport and was able to drive to the cemetery just in time to conduct the service. It was a sad day for me, because I never had any real assurance of my mother's salvation. Although I had spoken to her many times about the Lord, she never convinced me either by her words or lifestyle that she belonged to Him. To die without Christ is a tragic experience. But it is also tragic for saved loved ones who must continue on, unsure whether or not the departed one had ever trusted the Savior.

I hope I shall see my mother again someday, but I must wait and see.

Mr. Frank Graham, father of Billy Graham and one of our faithful Elders at Calvary, a wonderful man of God, had been ill for some time. After about a year he went to be with the Lord. Billy asked me to conduct the funeral service. In addition, he asked if I would meet him at the viewing about 9 o'clock in the evening after everyone had gone, as he desired to rededicate his life by his father's casket because his dad had meant so much to him. I met with Billy and several others.

His family and members of the team gathered around the casket and we all knelt in prayer. Billy was flat on the floor, face downward. I called on the Lord, giving thanks for this great man of God who had meant so much to all of us. I committed Billy's life afresh to the Lord and dedicated my own life and the lives of the other men who were with us in the room. It was a solemn experience. If Billy Graham felt such a burden to rededicate his life to the Lord, used as he was, how necessary it is that many in our churches do the same.

The funeral service the next day was attended by many Christian leaders who came out of respect for a man who had so much influence over so many through his lifetime. Billy's mother, Morrow Graham, was a great blessing to our family. She was a sincere saint of God and a

strong believer in the power of prayer. Having observed the parents of Billy Graham, I can well understand how each of their four children became a faithful Christian witness.

In all of my ministry, as I recall, I have always given an invitation to receive Christ at the close of my messages. Whether I was speaking to Christians or to non-Christians, it made no difference. In fact, I have always felt that even in a group of Christians there may be someone listening who needs the Lord.

In one of my former churches, a woman who appeared to be a Christian and was very active in the church, highly respected by everyone, came forward to receive Christ at the conclusion of my message on a Sunday morning. I couldn't believe what was happening. After the service, we sat down in a small room near the platform and I said, "I don't understand." "No, Pastor, you wouldn't, because what you saw gave every evidence of my having had an experience with God. But in my own heart I realized this morning that it was not real, and I want to give my life over to Jesus Christ and make Him my Savior and Lord." She did that, and what a remarkable change God gave!

Christian workers in a sense are salesmen for God, presenting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If we don't attempt to get people to sign on the dotted line for Christ, we are failing our mission.

On a Sunday evening in one of the

churches I served, as I was preaching I looked around at the people who were in attendance and concluded that I knew everyone, and that I was sure about their relationship to the Lord. I assumed that all the people were born-again Christians, so I decided to bypass the invitation and close the meeting with prayer so they could go home.

The following Wednesday night, one of our faithful women came to me after prayer meeting and said, "Pastor, I have been praying for my neighbor for years. She would never come to church with me, but Sunday night she offered to come. I prayed all during the message, which was a good message for her, and waited for you to invite her to Christ, but you didn't do it."

What a rebuke that was to me! It has never happened again. Whether on radio, in a school, in a church service, in a conference, or wherever, I am convinced that in spite of the appearance of those who are in the audience, someone may need Jesus Christ. If I do not give an invitation, I have failed in my responsibility. It need not be a long invitation. It can be very brief. But if the Holy Spirit is working in the heart of a person, he or she should have an invitation and be given an opportunity to respond and receive the Lord.

After seven and a half years of carrying on the broadcast along with the program at the church, I found the pressure becoming awfully heavy. I knew I had to do something, but I was

not sure what. Elva and I prayed about it several months and came to the conclusion that I should give up the pastorate and give my full time to the radio and conference ministry. We made arrangements with the Church Board, and after another month I announced my resignation.

At the close of the morning message, I asked the people to pray specifically for two things: (1) That we might find a suitable home within our price range. (2) That we might locate offices affordable for our radio ministry, which was still being carried on by volunteer workers, mostly in their homes.

After the service, as Elva went out to the parking lot, she was approached by a young businessman by the name of Jack Morris, who had recently begun to attend Calvary. He asked my wife, "What do you need by way of an office?" Elva told him we needed three rooms, one for the secretaries, one for the addressing equipment, and another for a studio. He said, "I just bought a little building for my business, and if you come down tomorrow morning you can pick out the three rooms you need."

We met with Jack on Monday morning and he had three nice rooms for us. In several weeks, we were all moved in and an office had been supplied at no cost. Jack was most cordial to us and a great help for years afterward.

On a rainy Saturday morning, shortly after we left the church, Elva and I decided to take a

ride out to the Cotswold neighborhood, where we hoped to find a house. As we drove from street to street, we spotted a sign that read: FOR SALE BY OWNER. We stopped for a few minutes with the motor running while we observed the appearance of the house, which was sitting back some distance from the street. Elva said, "Do you want to go in?" I said, "No, not now."

While we were looking, the owner was coming out the drive. He pulled up next to our car and said, "Would you like to see the inside?" I looked at Elva. She was smiling. So I answered, "Yes, we surely would." The gentleman and his wife showed us through the house. It was spotlessly clean and seemed to be perfect for our needs. We sat down and talked. When I asked the price, it was a good one but more than we could handle. I told him we would think it over. He said, "Come back Monday and we shall talk some more."

We returned Monday and said, "We don't think we can go through with this. Our funds are quite limited." He asked me what we thought we could pay. I was too embarrassed to tell him what I thought we could pay, so I raised it a little and told him. Then he lowered his price considerably. At that point I said, "I am interested." We made arrangements to buy the house, and over the next 18 years it served us well. Again, God had met our need in a marvelous way.

One of our listeners wrote to us from the

Knoxville, Tennessee, area to say that she had been listening to our program for some time and would like to have our family come for a week in the summertime and stay in her mountain home in Gatlinburg. She added, "The home is very rustic but you would be comfortable." I had been through some unpleasant experiences in "rustic" homes before, and this offer did not appeal to me. I answered the letter, trying to be as kind as possible, and said, "I'm very sorry, but I don't think we can come."

Later I had a week of meetings scheduled in Knoxville. After a morning Bible hour, a woman came to me and said, "I am Mrs. Dennis. I am the one who wrote to you about my home in the mountains. While you are here, I would like to take you over to Gatlinburg for lunch after a morning meeting, and we can go up the hill and visit the home." The next day we went. Several others went along, including the pastor. After lunch, we visited her home. The "rustic" home was a beautiful cottage at the top of a hill, comfortable in every respect. Mrs. Dennis said, "Don't you think you could come here for a week this summer?" I felt like a hypocrite when I said, "I'm beginning to think we can arrange this and we shall look forward to it!"

Mrs. Dennis was a very gracious woman and a lovely Christian who had a desire to live for the Lord. When we visited the home with our family the following summer, she had a layer

cake on the coffee table and a refrigerator filled with food. It was a delightful time of rest for all of us. The 23rd Psalm says, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." God knows when we need times of rest, and always, in His own way, He makes it possible. And to think, I almost missed it!

Chapter 13

Charlotte, North Carolina

Glad Tidings—New Location 1967

For 3 years after we left Calvary Church, we had experienced the gracious kindness of Jack and Pat Morris in providing offices for the *Glad Tidings* ministry. As time progressed, we realized that Jack's business was growing, his office space was cramped, and he needed more room, though he never mentioned it to us. Our radio ministry also had grown, and we needed more space. Elva and I began to pray that the Lord would provide a larger facility for our staff.

One day, when we talked to Jack about the possibility of moving, he became really upset. "No, don't do that," he said. "I will buy a piece of ground and build a larger building." He had taken a devoted interest in what we were doing and couldn't think of giving it up. Even his young son Eddie was involved in the ministry, working in the studio and helping with the taping responsibilities. But Elva and I were convinced that the time had come to move.

I had been invited to speak at a dinner for one of the adult Bible classes at the Northside

Baptist Church in Charlotte. Late in the afternoon on the day of the meeting, I received a phone call from Barry Shearer, one of the pastors at Northside, who informed me that he and his wife would be picking us up to take us to the meeting. After he arrived, he told us they had so many who wanted to come that they decided to move the meeting to the Adam's Mark Hotel. This sounded reasonable to Mrs. Blair and me, so we thought no more about it.

As we entered the hotel, Barry led us in the direction of the entrance to the banquet hall and let us go in first. As I pushed the door open, we saw hundreds of people gathered from far and near. I could hardly believe what I was seeing. Dr. Epp of the *Back to the Bible Broadcast* was seated on the platform, along with our good friend Clair Hess from the *Radio Bible Class*. Clair had been a friend for a number of years and was one of my favorite soloists. After I was asked to go to the platform, I saw friends in the audience from faraway places, including Minnesota, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. It was a total surprise—a banquet in honor of Mrs. Blair and me for having completed 40 years of ministry. What a memorable evening it was!

Two dear friends, Ruby Campbell, a Charlotte business woman, and Tom Gentry, manager of the Christian radio station WHVN and several other stations, were the instigators of the celebration. Someone had asked me months

before if I were to have a special speaker for an unusual event, who would he be. My quick response was Dr. Theodore Epp of the *Back to the Bible Broadcast*, who had been one of my favorite expositors of the Word of God for many years. I didn't have any idea about the plans that were being made for this marvelous event.

At the close of the evening, Elva and I were presented a beautiful set of luggage which met our traveling needs for years to come.

I have recalled this happy occasion many times, because it suggests to me what heaven must be like. When we close our eyes on this earth and suddenly arrive in heaven, we'll see our loved ones and people we knew for many years. Greatest of all, we'll see the Lord Jesus Himself. What an exciting time that will be for all who belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. God has wonderful things in store for those who love Him.

For a number of years we held annual *Glad Tidings* banquets in Charlotte, with outstanding soloists and speakers, which provided an excellent opportunity to meet many of our faithful radio listeners. The banquets were always well attended, but the best was when 1200 people came to hear our special guest J. Vernon McGee.

Other speakers were Paul Van Gorder, Vance Havner, Warren Wiersbe, John De Brine, Robert Vernon, Robert Dugan, Stephen Olford, George Sweeting, Elisabeth Elliot, Ike Keay, Lehman Strauss, Haddon Robinson, Ben Haden,

and Woodrow Kroll. I spoke at one of our Charlotte banquets, as well as the banquets in a number of other cities, including Baltimore, Nashville, and Knoxville. In addition, there were banquets at which I spoke in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Florence, South Carolina; High Point, North Carolina; and other cities where *Glad Tidings* was being aired.

Usually, Christian businessmen and their wives who showed a decided interest in our program were asked to assume the leadership and make all the arrangements in these various cities. They were a tremendous help to us and did an excellent job.

We were deeply grateful to JAARS, the radio and aviation arm of Wycliffe Bible Translators, which frequently flew our group to and from the out-of-town banquets on the same day as the banquet. This was an excellent help to all of us, saving much time and money. JAARS is located only 30 miles from Charlotte, which made things very convenient.

I was scheduled for a week of meetings in Salisbury, North Carolina, at the Maranatha Bible Church. Salisbury is only about 40 miles from Charlotte, so Elva and I drove up and back each evening.

As we went out Eastway Drive to get to the I-85 expressway, we saw a nice-looking ranch-type house for sale, and it was zoned *Business*. It looked quite interesting. We talked about it on

the way to the meeting, and we decided to take a second look when we returned. The next evening, we left for Salisbury a little earlier and drove up the driveway to the back of the house. There was a large yard, ideal for parking. After looking in several of the windows, Elva and I felt it was time to call the realtor. As we talked with him, it seemed even more interesting.

We made an appointment to meet with the realtor, along with the *Glad Tidings* Board the next morning. About half of our men were available to come, and after being shown through the house we discussed the possibility of buying the property. The price seemed about right, so we decided to move ahead. We made a down payment and shortly afterward we informed the people on our mailing list about our new location on Eastway Drive. In 9 months, through the kindness and generosity of God's people, the house became the home of *Glad Tidings*.

As we planned to use the house for offices, we realized that extensive changes needed to be made, which could prove to be very costly. We prayed about this, because after the purchase we had little capital left.

About a week later, Elva and I drove to Baltimore for meetings with Rev. Dan Cox, the pastor of the Bishop Cummings Reformed Episcopal Church. Dan had a strong evangelical witness for the Lord in the Catonsville area. After checking in at the motel, I received a phone call

from Ted Davidson, a former classmate from my Moody days. We had a refreshing visit on the phone, and he invited us to meet with him and his wife the next morning to have breakfast before our Sunday service.

We met at the restaurant and after a brief time of fellowship I asked, "What are you doing these days, Ted?" He replied, "Carpenter work, renovating houses." I said, "You are just the man we need!" After I told him about our new facility that needed renovation and changes to adapt to our needs, he responded, "When you are ready to drive home, let me know and I will go with you and look at the property."

Ted went back with us, and after examining the house and hearing of our needs he said, "Get me a cot and a frying pan and I will return in about two weeks with much of the material." Within two weeks, Ted returned with his car loaded with supplies and got things started.

The next day, we drove to an outlet store near Charlotte and were able to purchase a number of additional supplies at greatly reduced prices. We bought scores of sheets of birch paneling for \$1.00 a sheet and many other needed items at similar prices. Ted worked hard from early morning till late at night, and in several weeks he had the house ready.

After Ted had finished his extensive renovation, I asked, "What is all this going to cost us, Ted?" "Not a penny," he replied. "Just several

hundred dollars for the materials I brought down with me." What a provision! You tell me there isn't a God? Don't you believe it. He is always there and Philippians 4:19 is true: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." I assure you, there are no limits to God's marvelous provision through His dedicated people.

After we moved into the improved facility, we soon realized that we needed some special pieces of furniture in the studio and in some of the offices that could only be built to order. I went to see our friend John Seegers, a faithful member of Calvary Church, who had a large shop where he made all kinds of store and office furniture, and I told him about our need. He came by the office, and after looking at each room and seeing what we needed he went to work and produced it all. Soon it was installed and it looked beautiful. When I asked John for the bill, he replied, "There is no bill." Here was another of God's wonderful provisions.

Jack Morris was not too happy the morning we moved out, because he was sorry to see us go. But after we got situated he became the same as he had always been, a gracious friend and a tremendous help to *Glad Tidings*.

As the ministry continued to grow and I got older, we realized we needed more help. We began to search for a man who had radio gifts and who could do many of the things I had been

doing. We discovered that such gifted men were not too plentiful. We contacted some who seemed to fill the bill, but usually there were doctrinal or practical differences. For many months we kept calling and writing to men we thought could be useful to our ministry, but no one seemed to be available. After praying much about the matter, we knew God would have the answer. He had never failed us.

As we waited on Him, there were two people who came to our minds: our daughter and son-in-law who had been missionaries for 12 years. At the time, they were serving the Lord with Trans World Radio on Bonaire, an island in the Netherlands Antilles. We hesitated to contact them, for throughout my ministry I had tried to enlist young people for missions and send them to the mission field. Never before had I thought of bringing missionaries home. So we waited and prayed for some time before we felt urged of the Lord to make the contact.

One night we decided to phone them and tell them what we had in mind. We asked them to pray about it and let us know how the Lord directed. In several weeks, we received a phone call from Gary and Judy. They said, "*Glad Tidings* is a mission field too, and we believe the Lord would have us come." That was surely good news. Eventually they moved to Charlotte and have been a tremendous help ever since.

Years ago, when I was young in the radio

ministry and was eager to listen to anyone who would give me advice about radio, it was my pleasure to be with one of the worldwide broadcasters. Among the many subjects I discussed with him was how to support the program. I told him we did not ask for money but trusted God to supply. He responded very strongly, telling me I was not doing things right. "What you should do if you have a need," he said, "is think of someone on your mailing list who has lots of money. Give him a call and tell him what you need. Ask him what he can do to help. Then pray and ask God to lead him."

Having never done anything like this, the next time we had a special need I looked over the mailing list and found the name of a man who had been helping us generously on a regular basis. I gave him a call and told him we had a specific financial need and asked what he could do about it. He simply said, "I'll think it over." I never heard from him again, not even with his monthly offering. I learned very quickly that this kind of appeal was not God's method for me.

I have found over the years that the Lord works with different people in different ways. We sought God's plan for our ministry and have never changed our method of trusting God and not asking for money, and the Lord has supplied in a marvelous way. Because we don't ask for money on the air nor in any of our literature, some people want to know, "How is your min-

istry supported?" My answer is simple: *Glad Tidings* has always been entirely a work of faith. Our policy is based on the truth of Philippians 4:19, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

In light of this promise from God's Word, we decided long ago not to take our needs to people but to the Lord. He says, "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). We have put these verses to the test time and time again and God has never failed. He tests us on occasion, but our needs have always been met by faith.

Summertime is usually hard on Christian broadcasts. People are out of their usual routine and often overlook the support of Christian ministries. Some time ago, we came through the summer with a \$5,000 deficit. At our daily staff prayer meeting, we usually prayed for listeners who sent in their requests. But on this particular day, I suggested that we concentrate on our \$5,000 need and believe that God would supply.

We got on our knees and went to prayer. While we were praying, the phone rang. My wife went to another room and answered, and then came and tapped me on the shoulder, and whispered, "It's for you." A prominent Christian businessman was calling. After we exchanged

greetings, he said, "I am wondering how your work is going. Do you have any special needs?" My reply was, "Yes, Sir!" I told him we were all on our knees presently, beseeching God to supply the \$5,000 for our deficit. He said, "Pastor, I am going to write a check for \$2,000 and send it to you immediately." I thanked him and said, "You are an answer to prayer!" I returned to the staff prayer meeting and they were just finishing. I announced the provision and my wife said, "Let's sing the Doxology!" which we did.

In about 10 minutes, the phone rang again. This time I got to it in a hurry! It was the same man calling back. He said, "Pastor, I changed my mind. I'm going to tear up that check I just wrote." I thought to myself, *Oh, no! Not after we sang the Doxology.* And then he said, "When you said that I am an answer to prayer, it got to me. What I am going to do is write a new check for \$5,000."

God has provided for our financial needs for more than 40 years. We tell Him and He does the rest through His people.

Shortly after we began the *Glad Tidings* ministry in 1957, I was invited to speak at a missions conference in Sumter, South Carolina. Just before leaving, I got word from a station in the Philippines that wanted to begin airing our program. I mentioned this one evening at the meeting. I simply stated that the cost would be a certain amount per program, and we were

praying that God would speak to someone about this new opportunity.

After the service, a tall, handsome young man told me that he had served our country in the Philippines and was being retired from the Air Force. He said that he and his wife would like to contribute to this need. Later, he wrote and told me he would be contributing a regular amount each month. This retired Colonel and his wife have never missed giving month by month through the present time. This is how the Lord has chosen to keep us on our network. We praise Him for His faithfulness.

The Lord has provided dedicated employees in the same way. We had not been in our new headquarters very long when our volunteer engineer announced that he was moving to Norfolk to take a job with a Christian telecast. Again, we prayed, and it was only a matter of several weeks when Joe Brown, a young man employed by the telephone company, stopped by to see our facility. Before he left he said, "I am familiar with electronics and I work with radio. If ever I can be of any help to you, I gladly offer my services." Joe came and was with us over 20 years and never accepted a penny for his sacrificial services. The Lord led us to other valuable staff members. He always had the right person ready to fill the specific position.

We hadn't been in our new building very long when Elva and I were invited to a youth ser-

vice. Sitting behind us was a young woman who made herself known to us afterward, saying she was a regular listener to *Glad Tidings*. We phoned her several days later and asked if she would be interested in doing secretarial work at the radio office. Jean Williams came to work with us, and she was a faithful worker for more than 20 years.

Not long afterward, I was privileged to speak at a banquet for radio station WHVN and was seated next to the manager's wife, Brenda Gentry. We talked about several things, but in the midst of it all she said, "I'm thinking about going back to work." When I asked what kind of work she did, I learned that she had a number of skills. We contacted her later and she joined our staff. Like Jean, she did an outstanding job and was with us many years. We have thanked God again and again for these two faithful servants of God.

I shall never forget Norma Coleman, who came to our office one day and introduced herself. She said, "I am 40 years old and nobody wants to hire a 40-year-old woman these days." I said, "We do. We need you in the mail room." Norma came into our fellowship, and she also did a splendid job.

Whenever we had an open position, the Lord had someone ready to fill the gap. We needed a radio announcer: The Lord sent Robert Smith. We needed an administrator and secretary: The Lord sent Dr. and Mrs. Jim Kallam. We

needed general office workers: The Lord sent Ralph Juppe and Rev. and Mrs. Mucher.

This went on time and time again with Nell Emory, Catherine Ham, Lucille Griffin, and many others. I could not begin to list all the faithful workers God provided as the needs arose. When I think back over the years, how God supplied excellent workers all along the way, I would have to say it was a long line of miracles.

All of this is descriptive of the God we worship, isn't it? He is the mighty God, who knows no limits of any kind and always has a loving concern for His people. He says in Isaiah 65:24, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." You and I know that this promise is not only for *Glad Tidings* but for all of God's people who love Him and are living for Him. Whatever the need, He promises to supply. Our obligation is to believe Him and trust Him.

We thank the Lord also for all our faithful donors, who month after month have stood with us to help keep us on the air. How wonderful it has been to see God's people take such a committed interest in the *Glad Tidings* ministry.

I can't say enough for my wife, the mother of our three daughters, who has been my tireless companion in the ministry since its beginning. Not only has she worked long hours each day, but she has been an encouragement and inspiration to all of us.

I cannot express how grateful I am for all God's people who have shared the work of *Glad Tidings* during our many years on the air. They were wholly dedicated to the Lord, and God used them in a marvelous way to help make the ministry the blessing it has been to thousands.

Much of the success that we have enjoyed has been the result of our faithful Board. The Lord has always given us dedicated and Spirit-directed Board members from the beginning in St. Louis through the present time. Over the years the Board has had many changes. Some of our men have gone on to be with the Lord and some have moved to other cities.

The present Board members are Jim McClintock, Melvin Graham, Richard Meek, Kurt Niederer, Dr. Doug Smith, Pastor David Gales, Oscar Lennard, Dr. Smith Kirk, Tom Gentry, Dr. Norman Sloop, Dr. Wilbur Peters, and Roger Cann. All these men have helped us time and time again as we faced crises, and they have helped us make important decisions. I am ever grateful to God for each of these men.

After I was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease a few years ago, Elva and I moved into Aldersgate, a retirement community in Charlotte not far from our office. Now close to 90, we both plan to continue serving the Lord as long as we are physically able. He has been so good to us during our many years together. We want to keep praising Him until we meet Him face to face.

As Elva and I approached the 60-year mark of our Gospel ministry, our eldest daughter Sherril and her husband Hu talked to us about having a banquet for all who were on the *Glad Tidings* mailing list to celebrate the milestone. Although this was a wonderful thought, Elva and I felt something on a smaller scale would be better at that time. We finally decided to have a dinner and a program at Aldersgate. Our family and invited guests joined us for an evening of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for His abundant care and goodness for our 60 years in the Lord's service.

Sherril and Hu provided a splendid program. Our granddaughter Lisa Harrill was the soloist, and Dr. Charles Page, Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charlotte, was the speaker. They also prepared an interesting video depicting events in the lives of Mom and Dad. The evening was another of the highlights the Lord has provided down through the years.

Chapter Fourteen

The Latter Days

2001—

When I was about 17 years of age, I ran several marathons—one in Atlantic City and one in south Philadelphia. I did pretty well in Atlantic City—I finished fourth among the local entrants. That encouraged me to go to Philadelphia with the rest of our team. The temperature the day of the race was over 100 degrees and the humidity was very high. I was not used to that kind of heat, so I found it quite oppressive as I tried to run. Running was even more difficult because of the cobblestone streets. I faltered a few times and finally had to drop out, exhausted, almost halfway through the race. That ended my marathon experiences.

After I became a Christian, however, I learned that we Christians are also in a race. In the book of Hebrews, we are exhorted to “run with patience the race that is set before us” (12:1). We are told that the secret of success in this race is “Looking unto Jesus” (v.2). I have tried to keep my eyes on the Lord Jesus all the way through the race. There have been times when I faltered,

but I praise God that I never had to drop out. Now, the finish line cannot be far ahead. How near or how far, I do not know. One thing is sure: I know I will make it, for I read in Philippians 1:6, "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." God always keeps His word.

About 10 years ago, the Lord blessed me with the gift of Parkinson's disease. I have never complained about it. In fact, I have praised the Lord for it many times, because it has enabled me to learn new lessons that I never could have known otherwise.

The disease is getting progressively worse, but I am still able to carry on the work of the ministry, and I plan to continue to do so until I reach the finish line. At that time I shall be rewarded with the "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" (1 Peter 1:4). What a glorious day that will be! I have lived in anticipation of it for a long time. I have read about it and preached about it, and just think, one of these days I will experience it! Until then, by God's grace and as He gives me strength, I will keep on "Shining the Light."

The Lord has blessed Elva and me in many ways over the years. Early in our married life He gave us three wonderful daughters, who grew to be loving, caring, mature children of God. Never did they give us any trouble, only blessing. All three of them with their dedicated husbands

are serving the Lord in some area of Christian service.

Our eldest daughter Sherril, while she was a short-term missionary in Panama years ago, met her husband Hu. For 35 years they served the Lord in Panama as "tentmaker" missionaries, earning their own salary and working with military personnel in Panama until their recent retirement and return to Charlotte.

Our middle daughter Judy and her husband Gary served as missionaries with the Missionary Tech Team in Texas, and with Trans World Radio in Monte Carlo and Bonaire for 12 years. For the last 12 years they have been serving with *Glad Tidings* in Charlotte.

Our youngest daughter Cindy and her husband Harry have been associated for 17 years with Shades Mountain Christian School in Birmingham, Alabama. Cindy also teaches piano, is a church musician, and conducts Kinder Music classes.

Each of the girls has three children. Sherril and Hu have three sons. David, the eldest, graduated from college and returned to the Republic of Panama, where he is the Director of Crossroads Christian Academy. His wife, Lisa, is a counselor at the school. They have one son, Jacob Alan. John, the second son, after graduation from college, went to China to teach English. He and his wife Christa are the parents of Aysia, a beautiful baby girl. The third son, James, is in

Ohio, where he is studying to be a Physician's Assistant.

Judy and Gary's three sons have finished college and are married. Geoffrey, the eldest, is an ordained minister and serves as Pastor of Students at the Green Valley Baptist Church in Henderson, Nevada. His wife, Nancy, serves the Lord in many ways, as well as caring for their two children, Kara and Garren. Stephen is the Program Director for Crossroads Ministries in Boiling Springs, North Carolina. His wife Rhonda works with that ministry, as well as the Crisis Pregnancy Center in that area. Brian works in computer technology, specifically related to electronic advertising. Alison, his wife, is working on a graduate degree in Opera Performance.

Cindy and Harry's three daughters live in the Birmingham area. Heather is majoring in Art, with a concentration on Graphic Design. Rebecca is working toward her degree but has not yet decided on a major. Bethany is married to Jason Wilbanks. They are employed and planning to continue their education.

For 3 years Elva and I have lived in a small cottage at Aldersgate, a retirement community in Charlotte. The grounds cover about 225 acres, and our home borders on an azalea garden, which in springtime is one of the most beautiful sights we have ever seen. We no longer drive a car but use a golf cart to get around the campus. For other needs outside the campus, our two

daughters and their husbands who live in Charlotte are always ready to help.

Ever since I received Christ, Elva and I have enjoyed a fulfilling life together. We have been each other's best friend on earth, and as we have sought to follow the Lord together He has met every need.

If I were asked, "What is of greatest importance in life?" my ready answer would be: To know the Lord and follow Him. Next to that, I would say: Spend adequate time with Him the first thing every morning. For years, it has been the joy of my heart to spend the first hour of my day in God's Word, prayer, and Scripture memory work. This has certainly made each day sweeter and has provided help without which I could not have made it through life.

I offer thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has made living worthwhile. My only regret is that I did not come to Him sooner. Next to Him, I give thanks for my wife and family and all they have meant to me. I am also grateful for friends, scattered far and wide. We have known some of these dear people for years, and others only in recent years. But we praise God for every one of them.

I am grateful too for the opportunities the Lord has granted me to serve Him in various ways. Most of all, I thank Him for our radio ministry of more than 45 years, reaching out to the highways and byways with the truth of God. I ap-

preciate greatly the kindness of all who have shared with us down through the years to help keep *Glad Tidings* on the air.

I hope and pray that if you have never definitely received Jesus Christ into your life, you will consider doing it now. It isn't a difficult procedure. Christ our Lord suffered all the difficulty when He died on the cross for our sins.

In His marvelous grace Jesus says that whosoever will may come. When I came to Him more than 60 years ago, I had nothing, I was nothing, and I knew very little. But He became everything to me and He still is. He wants to become this to you.

I hope you will invite Him into your life and then follow Him day by day. Meet with Christ every morning through the Word of God and prayer, and then honor Him all day long. You'll find it to be a most fulfilling life.

Oh yes, there may be rough spots along the way, but there will also be an overwhelming number of good spots. I have found that we learn to appreciate the good times more because of the rough times. They all work together for good to those who love God.

The Lord bless you.

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All of Dr. Blair's books, booklets, and tapes are
available by writing to the address below.

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Shining the Light

Over the decades, Dr. Blair has continuously touched the lives of his radio listeners with his wise spiritual counsel from God's Word. He has the heart of a pastor, which shines clearly through every message and in his personal contacts. Vast numbers of people have come to know Jesus Christ in a personal way and experienced spiritual growth through his ministry. I am privileged to call him friend. —Dr. Charles D. Page
Pastor, First Baptist Church, Charlotte, NC

This autobiography is marked by the faithfulness of God and the fruitfulness of His servant. Brimming with experiences of the Father's provision, the author's delightful account of his life and ministry exalts the Lord Jesus, honors the Word, and gives encouragement by example both to young believers and mature Christians.

—Dr. Paul R. Van Gorder, Teacher Emeritus, RBC Ministries

For a number of years Dr. Blair was my pastor at Calvary Church. Seeing the way he has faithfully hidden the Scriptures away in his heart, I was greatly encouraged to do likewise. How grateful I am that he led us to memorize God's Word, especially now that I am visually impaired. Thank you, Dr. Blair, for your wonderful example.

—Elaine Townsend, Widow of Cameron Townsend,
Founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators and JAARS aviation.

"I was a suicidal, teenage alcoholic when Dr. Blair introduced me to Jesus and the grace of God. He taught me that God wanted a personal relationship with me, and that I could develop that relationship through Bible study and prayer. These two keys changed my life from depression and heartache to joy and purpose. I am proud to be one of Dr. Blair's spiritual children."

—Dave Dawson, Founder and Director, Equipping the Saints for Ministry

J. Allen Blair has greatly influenced many lives, and in his autobiography *Shining the Light* he continues his unique teaching. As he relates his experiences, he shows us how to follow God's pattern for a life of joyful and rewarding service for Christ. I thank the Lord for the brief time of ministry Dr. Blair allowed me to share with him in St. Louis, Missouri.

—Clair Hess
Senior Editor, RBC Ministries



Dr. J. Allen Blair has a rich heritage of more than 60 years of faithful service for the Lord Jesus Christ. Untold thousands of hearts have been blessed and lives have been changed because of the Father's hand upon His servants Allen and Elva.

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