

## **A Short Autobiography of a Long Life**

by Steve Gregg

I don't know whether it seems egotistical for a man to write autobiographically, but I have always thought that the unusual providence of God in my life makes a rather interesting, and, I hope, edifying tale worth telling. There is truly no part of the story which, rightly reported, would bring any credit to the reporter. I see, in my own history, a somewhat typical (if not exceptional) number of human failures and mistakes, accompanied by an unaccountably large measure of divine mercy. My testimony might be instructive or even inspiring to that small segment of the population whose curiosity has already been piqued by their prior familiarity with some aspect of my life or teaching, and who have every right to inquire into the character and background of any man who seeks to speak to God's people about God's things.

I wish to preface my story with one disclaimer. This is, of necessity, a selective narration. If I have seemed to record primarily those events that flatter me, I have not intentionally done so. There have been many occasions of failure and defects in my Christian life over the past six-plus decades that I have not cataloged here. I do not wish to conceal them, but I do not consider them to be particularly edifying to recount. They do not really describe the general or chosen course of my life, but rather illustrate the danger of assuming that a Christian's general success in walking with Christ somehow renders him invulnerable to snares and stumbling. I have actually written elsewhere of most of my embarrassing blunders. Here I would prefer to report the more characteristic and providential features of the first seven decades of my life. Let the reader not think that these are the only things, or the worst things, that I could report.

### **My Early Years**

I was born in Southern California, in 1953, and had the incalculable advantage of being raised by parents who were true Christians, and who succeeded in imparting their faith to their three children. I have an older sister and a younger brother. All three of us have attempted to serve the Lord from our early years, and all three are doing so today.

When I was two years old, I was found to be dying of starvation. Though I ate adequately, my body could not absorb nutrients. I had a bloated belly and scrawny limbs, like the starving children in the World Vision fund-raising ads. I was initially diagnosed, twice, as having cystic fibrosis, a deadly and incurable childhood disease, and was expected to die. My parents and many friends and relatives turned desperately to God, praying for a miraculous healing. My father (as he told me many years later) prayed at that time that I would not only be healed, but that I also would be called to the ministry. Interestingly, a later diagnosis indicated that I did not have cystic fibrosis, but a less-serious and treatable condition that has similar symptoms, called celiac. This is a congenital intolerance for gluten (a substance found in wheat, barley, rye and oats). Accordingly, my diet was altered and I was restored to normal health. By the grace of God, I have now enjoyed excellent health, with never a serious sickness for over 70 years, since then. Inexplicably, I remained celiac-symptom-free, even when, on occasion, I carelessly ate food containing gluten (which people with celiac should never do). More recently, a doctor friend of mine, upon hearing that I was asymptomatic, suggested that I be tested again for celiac. I did so, and the results of the test were negative. Since celiac is a genetic condition, and therefore not curable, this recent diagnosis adds to the mystery of my childhood diagnosis. Was I misdiagnosed, or was I miraculously cured? I may never know.

Sometime before I reached age four, I had a strange experience in my bedroom, which, as I learned a dozen years later, my older sister also witnessed. On this occasion, I lay sleeping, facing the wall and I heard a male voice speaking my name. Without looking around, and thinking it to be my father, I said, "What, Dad?" There was no answer, and out of curiosity, I looked to see who had spoken. No one was there. I returned to my original position to go back to sleep, but heard my name called again. I

answered as before and turned to see no one there. This also happened a third time. Seeing no one (and receiving no further communication) I simply went to sleep. The experience was just peculiar enough that I remembered it distinctly well into my adult life. On a certain day, when I was 17, my sister and I were recalling memories of our childhood. I had never mentioned this experience to her, but out of nowhere she mentioned that she remembered a night, when we were little, when she saw a man in white standing by my bed across the room (we shared a bedroom). As I now recall, she said that she heard me respond three times, saying, "What, Dad?" but she did not hear any words from the person. After the third time (she recalled), the man walked out of our darkened room into the lighted hallway, and it seemed to her that the light of the hall could be seen right through his body and clothing as he left. Upon hearing this remarkable description, I told her my memories of the event, and we concluded, naturally enough, that we had both recalled the same incident. What does it mean? I haven't a clue. It may have been the Lord visiting, in response to my parents' prayers, to heal my cystic fibrosis (if I ever really had that disease), or my celiac (if I ever really had that disease) or to call me into ministry. I may never know the significance of the event in this lifetime. However, from my childhood on, I remember myself as having an innate reverence for the Lord and a desire to learn the Bible. I responded to my first "altar-call" at age four, and went forward a second time, at age ten, at the Billy Graham Crusade in Los Angeles. As a pre-teen, I had a desire to read through the whole Bible, and started doing so several times, but did not have the self-discipline ever to finish.

## **My Teen Years**

When I was a freshman in high school, I had already concluded that I wanted to preach the gospel. Nothing else seemed more important to me than helping to direct lost people toward heaven. On occasion, I went "witnessing" door-to-door, and evangelized friends at my high school. I was chosen by my peers to lead the youth group at the Baptist church that we attended. I took speech classes so that I would have the opportunity to preach sermons to the others in the class. I had given a speech in junior high against evolution, and took every opportunity I could to improve my information and to give that talk wherever I had an opening given to me. My hero was Billy Graham, and I occasionally wrote sermons that were direct plagiarisms comprised of extracts from his sermons. At age fifteen, I served as a counselor at the Billy Graham Crusade in Anaheim.

If I have given the impression that I was a spiritual young man during these years, the impression is partially misleading. I did, in fact, care for the things of God and for the salvation of souls, and I knew that nothing could be more important than these things. However, in our church, I had never really understood discipleship. My parents were good people, and sincere Christians, but no one had ever disciplined them either. I had no grasp of what being a disciple of Jesus in everyday life should entail. The heroes in my life were preachers and missionaries, but I was myself very carnally minded. I had no actual, compelling vision of the kingdom of God (as I later came to understand it). My loyalty to Christ was sincere enough, but my grasp of what it meant to really know and follow Him was fragmentary—and shallow—in the extreme! I was providentially kept from falling into the standard sins of the teens of the sixties and seventies—not by any innate virtue of my own—but by the grace of God (and by the fact that, as a card-carrying "nerd," I was not at all attractive to the hip people whose carnality and popularity I secretly envied).

When I was sixteen (1970), my family moved from Covina, California, to Orange County. I had lived in Covina as long as I could remember, and I resisted moving away from my friends and familiar surroundings. My sister had begun playing in an all-girl, secular rock band (we had never heard of Christian rock at that time) and hanging-out with guys who were long-haired musicians, just as the hippie movement was at its height. I was attracted to the hippie "look", and was intrigued by the idea that I might be able to conceal my nerdiness by such a simple expedient as merely growing long hair! To my chagrin, my father would not let me grow my hair long while living at home. By the time we moved to Orange, I was starting to feel a little bit of rebellion against my parents. In retrospect, I think

I was probably in danger of seriously compromising my Christian life, had not the Lord, in His sovereign mercy, laid hold of me and thrust me into the midst of a movement that marked me for life.

## **The Turning Point**

In 1970, the Jesus Movement was in its early stages in Orange County, where it would soon receive international attention in the secular media. While living in Covina, some 40 miles away from Orange County, we had not yet heard a thing about that growing, young revival, which was centered at Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa. On my first day at Orange High School, I noticed another new guy at the school named Michael Moore, because, as new students, we had not yet suited-up for P.E. class, and we both wore wire-rimmed glasses (a rather rare style at the time, usually associated with hippies). Michael and I eventually became close friends—especially after I found out that he was a Christian. He invited me to go with him to his church, which happened to be Calvary Chapel. The original draw was that he and I were guitar-players seeking to start a band, and he told me there were lots of bands that played at his church, and that we might be able to play there too. Being new to the area, this seemed to be a good way to meet new Christian friends, so I agreed to go with him on a Wednesday night.

I will always remember my first visit to Calvary Chapel with fondness and awe. This small church building was quite off the beaten path, surrounded by many acres of farm land (the area is now all condominiums and shopping malls). It was a rainy night, and the church parking lot was not yet paved, so it was just a muddy mess, with cars angled into undefined parking spaces. Having sometimes attended the not-so-full midweek prayer meetings at our former Baptist church, I was surprised to see so many cars out on a Wednesday night in such inclement weather (I soon learned that the situation at Calvary Chapel was the same six nights a week).

The church was designed to accommodate, I would think, about 300 people, though perhaps twice that number had somehow gotten crammed inside out of the rain. A person looking down from the rafters at the gathering below would not have been able to identify the color of the carpeting because of the multitude of hippie-looking bodies sitting wherever it was physically possible to shoe-horn themselves into what seemed like a sea of humanity. The platform at the front was also covered with kids, and the most captivating music I had ever heard was being played by a band called “Love Song” with their acoustic guitars and four-part vocals. Upon hearing this amazing and anointed band, one of my first thoughts was, “If I had any delusions about my playing music on that platform, I can now see that the standards are much too high for me even to consider it” (I later did have occasion to minister in music from that platform).

Entering the church, I was fortunate to find a spot to sit on the carpet in the foyer, amid perhaps fifty others. I happened to sit by a guy, who, like everyone else, looked like a hippie. He had a radiant smile and said, “Hey, Bro! Do you know the Lord?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “Cool! How long have you known Jesus?” I said, “Oh, about twelve years, I guess.” “WOW!” he marveled. “I just met the Lord two weeks ago!” And he told me of how God had delivered him from his drug habits and had used him to lead his parents to Christ.

Now I was the one marveling! From his enthusiasm, it seemed to me that he had more of the reality of God in his life than I even knew was available to a Christian. Then he asked a question that perplexed me. He said, “What has the Lord been doing in your life?” I will never forget this, because of the stunned feeling I had when asked this question. I felt like a deer in the headlights. I could tell that he would have been able to give a very good answer to that same question, had I asked him, but to me, the question was incomprehensible. If he had spoken the sentence in tongues, it could not have been more unintelligible to me at my then state of spiritual awareness. It had never occurred to me that the Lord works here and now in my life. I had only been taught that, if a person believes in Christ, he will go to heaven when he dies. The concept of divine providence and intervention in daily affairs

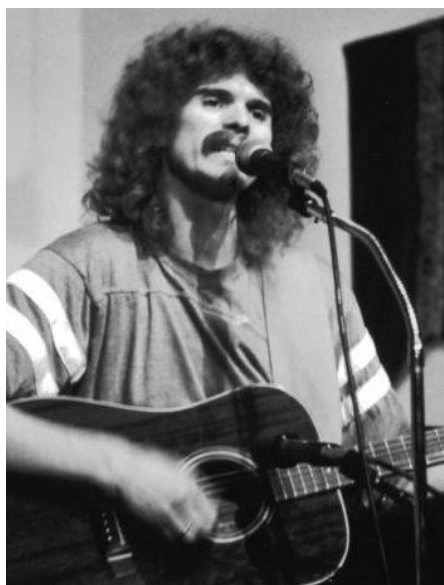
was completely foreign to me. Yet I knew that it was an important question, and it led me to realize that I had come to know a great deal about God, without really knowing Him very well. I knew God, mostly “by hearsay.”

In my youth, I had always been drawn to the occasional “revival weeks” at the Baptist church, and had always been delighted when a few people would respond to the “altar call.” However, nothing had prepared me for what I was to see this night. I heard a hippie preacher (Lonnie Frisbee), who was probably 90% illiterate, give as simple and compelling a gospel message as I had ever heard, and was thrilled to witness at least fifty people respond to the call to “come forward.” I later learned that this happened every night at Calvary Chapel, and that approximately a thousand young converts were being baptized every month. Being exposed to this revival made me aware of my own spiritual dissatisfaction and I felt an inner drive to know God better, as these people knew Him. So, I returned to Calvary Chapel every night of the week for two years.

After a few visits to Calvary, I noticed a recurring theme in conversations with these people. They often spoke of something called “the baptism in the Holy Spirit”—a term with which I was not familiar. I began to research the subject at home in my Bible, discussing it with my sister and my parents, who also had begun attending Calvary Chapel regularly. One night I went to church determined to receive the baptism in the Spirit. After the service, the same hippie who had been preaching the night of my first visit, laid hands on my head and prayed for me to be filled with the Spirit. I was initially disappointed. From my studies in the Scripture, I had expected to speak in tongues, but I did not. I almost concluded that the attempt was a failure, but then my good ol’ Baptist upbringing (“God said it; I believe it; that settles it!”) kicked in. I thought, “God said that He would give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13). I have asked. Therefore, I believe that He has given what He promised.”

Even though I did not speak with tongues that night, I did receive many other confirmations that something had changed. The first was an uncanny inner awareness of the presence of God, which has remained with me now for more than half a century. God was suddenly more REAL to me, not just “a deduction from adequate evidence.” I went home from church, and as soon as I walked in the door, my parents said, “What happened to YOU?” I said, “I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit tonight.” My mother said, “I thought so!”

Though I have since spoken in tongues, I did not do so for months afterward. However, the immediate evidence for the change in my life along other lines was unmistakable. God’s presence in my life



became a reality such as cannot even be adequately communicated to a person who is in the condition I had been in formerly. Reading the Bible was suddenly like reading an actual letter from a well-known acquaintance, and I wanted to read it all the time, just so I could know Him better and learn His will for every particular of my life. For the first time, my Bible reading yielded actual insight and understanding. When I read the Gospels or the book of Acts, instead of seeming like remote historical data, the stories seemed entirely true-to-life, such as I could expect to happen any given day in my own life. Living just like Jesus or Paul seemed entirely realistic—and even desirable—for the first time in my life. Prayer was natural, spontaneous and very much like talking to someone who really is there.

I noticed something else too. I had had something of an anger problem in my youth, but that vanished completely the night I was prayed for. I now felt an abiding and unconditional love

and sympathy for all people, along with a complete sense of resignation to the will of God, which made it impossible for me to become angry with anyone. With very few interruptions, this temperament has continued to characterize my life in the intervening decades since that night.

I received, for the first time, a compelling vision of the Kingdom of God as a dynamic, real, alternative society existing alongside this world's culture, having another King—one Jesus. From that day to this, I have never felt that this world could ever be a real home to me, nor did I want it to be. So far as observations could ascertain, I have generally been as content with my lot in life as is anyone I know—and happier than most. I have, nonetheless, always also sensed that I am a pilgrim and a stranger domiciled away from home. The feeling is actually that of an agent of a foreign government, representing the interests of an absentee Monarch, placed on earth solely to advance His influence among men. As such, I eagerly anticipate a discharge from this life as soon as He deems my work here to be completed. I was by no means unique in adopting this attitude (actually, it seems more as if I was adopted by it), but there were, even in our own church, at least “seven-thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” I believed that I saw this pilgrim character in the majority of the “Jesus People” (occasionally called “Jesus Freaks”), and to this day I regard such a mentality to be normative for Christianity of the biblical variety.

It was immediately evident to me that nothing could ever command my loyalty again like the Kingdom of God, and that any vocation that did not directly promote the interests of that kingdom seemed to me pointless and boring. I knew instinctively that I could never again see myself as anything other than the happy slave of Christ, having no agendas of my own, but obliged to seek and to fulfill His wishes for me day by day. “If it please the king...” was the unspoken but implied concern that conditioned every contemplated enterprise.

The Jesus People were not superior or “advanced” Christians at all. They were, more properly, primitive Christians. To me, that is the most desirable kind of Christian to be, even if only from the standpoint of advantage to the believer himself. I don't see any grounds for thinking in terms of “superiority” in the comparison of one kind of Christian with another. I know that I am not now, and have never been, a better man than any other sincere believer. I simply marvel with gratitude at the grace of God that apprehended me for a deeper life than I would otherwise have had knowledge to pursue!

I know that the theology of some will incline them to suggest that what happened to me at age sixteen was not some “second work of grace,” but, rather, my actual, first-time, genuine conversion. A case could well be made for this, and I would not care to argue the point. All that matters to me is what has been the reality in my life ever since that day. Theories about whether I was really saved or not, prior to that night, are of secondary interest to me, at best.

## **Entering the Ministry**

I knew that I would serve God in some form of ministry (initially, I thought it would be evangelism, and for a while, it was). When I spoke to sinners about Christ, it was not like before. I am not sure that I had successfully led even one person to Christ in all my evangelistic attempts previously, but after that night in 1970, there appeared to be an unction in my words that caused sinners to come under conviction, and some were being saved. My sister and I formed a Christian band, called “New Wine,” which eventually had some good talent in it, though I was arguably the weakest link musically. Shortly after the band was formed, we were invited to do a concert on a Sunday night at the Baptist church where we had grown up. At the end of the concert, I gave a short, unpremeditated “sermon” and an invitation for those present to receive Christ. The Spirit of revival seemed to fall and forty-something people came forward, many of them weeping. We had never seen such a thing in that church in the years we had been there before. I had spoken there in my earlier teens, but had never

seen anyone converted through my efforts. In fact, one of the guys who came forward was a former friend from Covina High School, to whom I had often witnessed previously without success.

The following school year (my senior year), I was asked by the “Jesus People” in my high school to teach them the Bible daily at lunchtime. I had never “taught” the Bible, nor considered doing so. Being now just seventeen, I did not consider myself to be particularly knowledgeable, but the others were all newer inductees, whereas I had been reading the Bible all my life, so I thought I’d give it a go.

I was personally amazed at how naturally this activity came to me...how readily supporting texts and appropriate illustrations seemed to present themselves to my mind as I was trying to elucidate a biblical concept. I would find myself getting new and clearer understanding of many texts, even as I was teaching them. My teaching was well-received, and I became one of two “Jesus People” leaders on campus (the other leader was Michael Moore, who had originally taken me with him to Calvary Chapel, and whom I personally looked up to as a leader and teacher). My Bible studies (like those of other teachers during the revival) came to be well-attended, and I was invited to teach in other venues as well— coffee houses, Christian communes, church youth groups and camps, home Bible studies, etc. This included occasional invitations to come back and speak to my old youth group at the Baptist church in Covina. On one such occasion, after listening to my teaching at the college group there, the overseer of the group, who had known me since childhood, asked me, “Steve, where did you get your knowledge of the Bible?” I frankly did not know how to account for it myself, and could only say, “Well, I grew up in this church from childhood.” He quipped, ironically, “You didn’t get it here!” I guess he was right. I had probably learned more of the Bible in one year of attending Calvary Chapel than I had acquired in all my previous years in the Baptist church. But even my sitting under the inspiring teachers at Calvary could not account for many of the more “original” kinds of insights or supporting Scripture passages that frequently came to me either while teaching or in private meditation, to which my thoughts were irresistibly drawn “day and night” (Psalm 1:2). I could only attribute the spontaneous presentation of biblical data to my mind to a spiritual “gift”, which apparently became obvious to others before it did to me.

I had some modest reputation as a teacher of the Bible while in high school. So, upon graduation, I was invited to serve a Christian coffee house ministry in Orange County. My first assignment was to conduct a weekly meeting at which I was to answer Bible questions for new converts. At that same time, my sister and I were playing in the band we had formed (along with Michael Moore). The band was playing on the Christian coffee house circuit about three times a week.

### **Stranger in a Strange Land**

I read through the Bible, and little else, several times over the following six years. I never went anywhere without a Bible, and read it several hours a day, meditating upon it day and night, until I knew much of it by heart. In later years, though I continued my study of the Bible, I also began to avail myself of some of many books by great Christian authors: A.W. Tozer, William Law, C.S. Lewis, Thomas a Kempis, Hannah Whitall Smith, Watchman Nee, Richard Wurmbrand, Elizabeth Elliott, George Müller, and many others.

I soon found that my values and passions were quite different not only from the world, but also from many of those in the evangelical churches.

I had two principal goals in life—the first was to glorify God and promote His kingdom. I could not see any value in devoting any of my gifts to anything so mundane and time-bound as merely “making a living” or “making a name” for myself. I was gripped with a vision for eternity that made all activities simply boring, unless I could see that they had a direct impact upon the eternal destinies of people. To concern myself with anything less simply seemed to me to be a poor investment of the few years I have been given on earth to accomplish something. By an involuntary instinct, I tended to look at

Jesus and Paul as my principal mentors. I was willing to work full-time at secular, minimum-wage jobs, when it seemed as if this was what God was asking of me, and, during my first twelve years of ministry I “made tents” in this way on various occasions for brief periods. But whenever I was devoting most of my days to just making money, I felt completely out of my element, like a restless, confined animal, chomping at the bit and eager to exchange a predictable, but meaningless, income for the greater and more meaningful adventure of preaching the gospel or of having an eternal impact on my generation. This became my one transcendent passion when I was sixteen. In the intervening decades, I have not noticed much change in my attitude in this respect.

My passion for an alternative society eventually tended to marginalize me from many in normal society. During the Jesus Movement revival, there were plenty of young zealots eager to hang around me, in order to be discipled—but as years passed, the much-hyped rapture, which most were looking for, was delayed and the revival faded. The number of those who seemed to share a passion for simple, primitive Christianity seemed to diminish with each passing year. The Jesus People were growing-up, getting jobs, getting married, and getting rich (in Orange County, at least). Observing this trend, I determined that I would not become absorbed into what I saw as the trap of investing my life in merely temporal pursuits.

Therefore, apart from my relationship with Jesus, I often felt increasingly isolated in this world—except on those rare occasions when I met similar God-obsessed brothers (and sisters), who usually were experiencing similar marginalization and loneliness.

This phenomenon presented special challenges for the obtaining of my second life goal, which was, of course, to be joined to a godly and like-minded wife. I actually was more than willing to be a eunuch for the kingdom of heaven, if God were to bestow that gift upon me, but since He did not appear to have done so, I sought and prayed for His other priceless gift—a godly mate. The ideals of a Christ-honoring marriage and family were almost as compelling to me as was my passion for my calling in ministry. Having been raised in such a home, I considered that marriage, rightly done, offered earth’s best prospect for spiritual fruitfulness and personal fulfillment. I also had enough of a normal male drive (which I was determined never to gratify outside of marriage) to make me sometimes distracted in my work when attractive female disciples or co-workers were at hand. It seemed as if being married would be less distracting than remaining single.

## **Marital History**

I have had more broken marriages than any man should have to endure. I have been deprived of my youthful goal of a life-long marriage like that of my parents due to the abandonment of not one, but two, wives—so that I spent two seasons of my adult life raising my children as a single dad.

My view of marriage has always been very lofty. I understand Christian marriage to be a witness to the world of the relationship of Christ and the Church. I have never believed in divorce, and, in fact, could not be induced to initiate a divorce, even at gunpoint. Few could be found who take a stronger position against divorce that I do. Yet, one does not always have the choice whether his or her marriage will end in divorce, and many who would never divorce find themselves the victims of their spouses’ unfaithfulness or abandonment.

At age nineteen (1972), I fell for a girl in the Jesus Movement who had been converted from a wild and loose, hippie background. Since I had deliberately remained a virgin until marriage, and had never used drugs, alcohol or tobacco, our backgrounds were as diverse as night and day. At age 18, in the midst of a revival in which thousands of hippies were being saved and transformed by Christ, I naively assumed that Paul’s statement, *“Old things are passed away...all things become new”* means that conversion erases all of the effects of a sinful past (I had never seen a backslider and assumed such was impossible).

We were married, and within two years, as a result of my wife's inability to embrace monogamy, the marriage was a seemingly hopeless disaster. Apart from a daughter, born to us in first year of marriage, there was little that resembled a marriage in our life together. Though I considered that her affairs provided me with biblical grounds for divorce, I also believed it to be more Christ-like for me to remain faithful and to work on the marriage in fulfillment of my vows. Even if my wife never were to repent, I was determined to maintain my integrity and keep the promises made before God and witnesses.

My wife finally deserted and divorced me—marrying another (and then another)—and I was left to raise a toddler, which I did until she was in her late teens. At age 21, I bore the stigma of a divorcee, and assumed my ministry would be thus tainted, and possibly destroyed. However, doors remained open, so I continued to minister.

Six years after the divorce (in 1980), at age 27, I met and married a very like-minded and devout Christian girl, named June. She was taken the same year in a roadside accident (more detail on that, below).

While married to June, we had become close friends with the parents of a young, zealous, Christian woman, who would later become my third wife. This woman's parents, like herself, were enthusiastic, regular attenders at a Bible study that I was teaching every weekday morning in a restaurant in Santa Cruz, California. About the time of June's death, this young woman went overseas to the mission field with Youth with a Mission, and was intending to become a career missionary.

When she returned home after her first tour of the mission field, her parents played a major role in getting her and me together—which I didn't mind in the least, since she was attractive and seemed to have a passion for the things of God. As mentioned, she and I married and, subsequently, had four wonderful children—two sons and two daughters—to add to my first daughter, who was nine at the time of the wedding.

Very early on in our married life, telltale difficulties manifested. As in many marriages, conflicts arose because we were quite different from one another in significant ways that we had failed thoroughly to explore before marriage. We both were committed to our vows, and strove to resolve our difficulties in a godly manner. She remained in the marriage for twenty years. Though there were factors that made the relationship difficult, I thought we had a very enviable family, and I never had occasion to suspect that anything short of death would prevent us from spending the rest of our lives together.

That my wife was not happy was often evident and was of great concern to me, but I was optimistic that our mutual commitment to Christ and to our family would keep us together permanently—more than long enough to work through our challenges. This was a sad miscalculation on my part.

Without explanation, my wife walked out on the family in November, 2001. This departure was abrupt and unexpected, because it was at a time when our relationship had recently taken an encouraging turn for the better. Her departure left me dazed and devastated. Thankfully, my children (mostly in their teens at the time) chose to remain with me, and their mother surrendered them to my legal custody without a fight or negotiation. Within four months of her departure, she had divorced me and resumed her pre-conversion lifestyle, living essentially as if she had never known Christ or been married.

The youngest of my children was only 10. He and three of his siblings were still at home, so I was a single parent for the next 10 years. My former wife refused all contact and communication with me, but within a few years, my children informed me she had remarried, but had also soon divorced again.

Late in 2010, I had the supreme blessing of meeting Dayna, who had been single almost as long as myself, after suffering a similar heartbreaking abandonment. After year, we became engaged and we married a few months later. Like myself (but unlike my previous wives), Dayna had been converted in childhood and remained in the faith all her life. Having been reared in a Christian home, she had also been involved in various ministries from the Jesus Movement onward. She had raised two great sons. When I met her, she had been an art professor in colleges in Arizona and California for nearly 40 years. A few years after we married, she retired from teaching, and became a full-time worker with me in ministry.

We were both nearly 60 when we met. In my ten years of single fatherhood, I had come to assume that it would be extremely unlikely for me to meet a compatible woman. One concern stemmed from the fact that I would want to be matched with someone, who, like myself, had lived her entire life as a studious Christian. People who have grown up and grown old with firm Christian faith normally have become established in certain theological positions, from which they may well have become immovable. Since I had seldom met people who shared my rather eclectic variety of positions, I assumed that any life-long Christian woman I might meet, would probably not share the same eclectic theology. Surprisingly, Dayna, for many years, had already held some of my less-popular convictions prior to having heard them from me. She was also quite open to learning (on our first date, she was fascinated to learn that there were three views of hell—and urged me to write a book on the subject!). She was very relieved to meet someone who shared and could articulate many of her less widely-held convictions.

In January, 2012, we were married and became partners in the ministry. Her decades of faithfulness to Jesus have made her a valuable counselor to younger women, and she has an amazing gift of hospitality.

Remarriage after divorce is a controversial matter among Christians, but I have always been of the view that Christ's teachings permit it when a previous marriage covenant has been broken through infidelity. Not all Christians read Christ's words that way, and by marrying again, both Dayna and I knew we would thereby invite the criticism of some, who see the matter differently. I would gladly live my entire life without controversy, if I could. Regrettably, I have not been given that luxury.

## **Diversifying in Ministry**

In my last year of high school and in the years that immediately followed graduation, I was playing guitar and piano and singing the lead vocals in a Christian rock band that my sister and I had formed (she was the bass player, though she could play several instruments). I enjoyed the music ministry and there were lots of opportunities to play in coffee houses and concerts in the early seventies in Southern California. When the band broke up, due to members getting married and needing to "get a real job," I continued to play some solo concerts and formed a few small ad hoc bands for special concerts that I was invited to do. Eventually, I realized that I was not an excellent musician, and could not become such without giving a great deal of time to that goal. I was devoting a lot of time to Bible teaching, for which I had more definitive spiritual gifts. The choice between becoming a more proficient musician and that of becoming a better Bible teacher was an easy one for me. Bible teaching seemed to promise greater potential for effecting beneficial change in people's lives than did performing music (though people were getting saved through the latter as well). Sometime around 1981, I left the music ministry to devote all of my energies to biblical study and teaching. Since the 1980s, I have played very few concerts, and only occasionally lead worship.

During the years that followed high school, in addition to doing the music ministry, I often worked full-time as a volunteer for a number of Christian organizations and churches, and part-time for my support at various secular jobs. Through most of the seventies, I was a long-haired radical Christian

vagabond adventurer for Jesus, traveling around the country (sometimes by Greyhound, sometimes “by thumb”), playing music and teaching in churches, coffee houses and home gatherings. At 19, I went to Germany where I helped in the planting of a small church of Jesus People. Nine years later, this church merged with an existing Assemblies of God church there. In 1982, I became an international lecturer for Youth with a Mission (a.k.a. “YWAM”—an organization that I never joined, but for whom I have traveled and taught since 1982). Over the years, largely through the auspices of YWAM, I have done so on every continent.

From 1975 through 1978, I ran small, independent discipleship schools of my own in Santa Cruz, California. I moved back to Southern California and, in 1979, Keith Green invited me to become an elder at his ministry-community in Woodland Hills (which I declined because I thought it would conflict with my work of raising my five-year-old daughter as a single dad).

After I married my second wife June, in 1980, I accepted an invitation from Calvary Chapel of Santa Cruz, California, to become the church’s worship leader. I had lived there previously in the mid-70s, where I had gained a reputation as a musician and teacher. Within a month of our move back to Santa Cruz, I was teaching nine times a week, as well as leading the worship for the church.

June was one of the remarkable, saintly women of the church, and all who knew her admired and appreciated her for her sincere and evident love for God and purity of heart. She seemed more like an angel than anyone I had ever known, and most felt intuitively that she belonged more to another world than to this one. God apparently agreed with this opinion.

Her death a few months after our arrival stunned the church and was publicized throughout the city and among missionaries abroad. The fact that her dying act was the selfless one of shoving my seven-year-old daughter out of the path of the speeding truck that took her life inspired many. Some converted as a result. After her death, a shocking degree of public honor was heaped upon me and my ministry, due to the evident grace of God that sustained us through the tragedy. At that time, I was asked to serve as the principal teaching elder (under the senior pastor) at Calvary Chapel, Santa Cruz. I served there for about three years before moving to Oregon in 1983.

I have also had opportunity to lecture and debate in high schools, universities, and over the airwaves. I enjoy debate and consider it to be an excellent educational and evangelistic tool, and I have always been eager for more opportunities to engage in such on any topic of significance. I have only rarely found evolutionists who are willing to debate, but have, on many occasions, participated in debates with Christian brothers of various theological persuasions...Calvinists, Cessationists, Dispensationalists, advocates of Eternal Security, etc. Such debates have always been conducted in a friendly manner, and, to my mind, have been profitable.

In 1983, along with seven couples from Calvary Chapel, Santa Cruz, I started the Great Commission School in Bandon, Oregon (later relocated to McMinnville, Oregon), which I directed for the following 16 years. The Great Commission School also conducted a branch school in Honduras for two consecutive years (our family lived in the jungle compound of this school for three months, when the children were young). For some years, there was also a Great Commission School in Ontario, Canada, planted by some of our former students. That school later merged with (or morphed into) a congregation called “Grassroots Church,” in Thunder Bay.

I have done a considerable amount of writing—primarily in answer to questions posted on our Internet Bible forum. In my youth, I wrote and drew over 50 comic-style tracts and discipleship manuals (did I mention I was a cartoonist?), which were printed and distributed by three different publishers. I’ve also written a few well-reviewed books on various biblical topics, the most important of which is the two-volume work: *Empire of the Risen Son: A Treatise on the Kingdom of God*. My books comparing different views of Revelation and Hell, respectively, have received a very good reception.

Radio broadcasting became another ministry avenue of interest to me. Beginning in 1984, I hosted a live Bible Q and A radio program, called *Feed My Sheep*. Around 1990, I began to guest-host for another man's radio program, when he had to be away from the microphone. In 1997, I started doing the live Q and A thing daily on my own program, called *The Narrow Path*. As of this writing, I still host this program daily.

After running the Great Commission School for 16 years, I decided to "change gears," due to approaching "burn-out," and I closed down the school. My then wife and I had lived for several years on a small farm acreage, which we had purchased in Oregon. In 1999, we accepted an invitation to minister in a small community in Northern Idaho. We sold our Oregon homestead and purchased a log home on six rural acres outside Grangeville, Idaho. My wife continued living her dream of homesteading for a couple more years there. We were living there at the time of her leaving.

While I was still in Idaho, some of our Great Commission School alumni restarted up a new school in Oregon under a new name, The Berean School of the Bible. In 2003, I was asked to return to Oregon and direct the Berean School as I had previously directed the Great Commission School. I declined, not wishing to be involved in organizational leadership, but agreed to return to teach there in exchange for accommodations for my family. I did this for one year, but found that raising four kids without a mother demanded more time than I could devote while teaching at the school. The children and I returned to our previous home in Idaho for about a year. In 2005, I brought the kids back to Santa Cruz, California, from which we had come 23 years earlier.

When Dayna and I got married, in 2012, I returned to Southern California because Dayna had a professorship and a home in that area.

I currently continue to teach internationally, and locally, in churches and other venues. In 2006, one of my former students conducted a Great Commission School in Jerusalem, where I taught a few weeks. In 2007, I made my first ministry trip to Africa, teaching native pastors in Zambia. In 2016, I returned to Africa to again train pastors in Cameroon.

My primary website, [www.thenarrowpath.com](http://www.thenarrowpath.com), is a repository of well over a thousand audio files of my lectures, which can be heard or downloaded without charge. These include verse-by-verse lectures through the whole Bible, taught originally at The Great Commission School, though many have been updated. There are also several hundred lectures there on various theological and practical topics. At the "Resources/Links" tab, one can link to many ancillary sites and YouTube channels also containing my lectures. Audiobooks of several of my books can also be heard there for free. A mobile app that gives access to all these resources from your phone or device can be downloaded by directing your phone's browser to the web page [www.thenarrowpath.app](http://www.thenarrowpath.app).

## **Theological Pilgrimage**

I began my ministry having the factory-installed theology of my Baptist upbringing, with only the addition of the charismatic convictions that I picked-up through my early association with the Jesus Movement and with Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa. These default views amounted, primarily, to a quasi-Calvinistic approach to providence and salvation, mixed with a thoroughly dispensational eschatology. Initially, I was not even aware that there were names for these sets of beliefs. I assumed that what I had been taught was simply "what the Bible teaches." I wasn't really aware of there being much controversy among Bible-believers over my beliefs.

I was (and am) a firm believer in the divinely-inspired authority of scripture, so it has always been my commitment to believe whatever I find the Bible to teach, regardless who, or how many, might

disagree. Of course, I was raised assuming that only heretics and liberals—people lacking an adequate respect for the Bible—would disagree with anything that I had been taught.

I suppose the first new ideas that I developed, from my personal study of the scriptures, were what would best be termed “Anabaptist” convictions. In my youth, I had never met a Mennonite, nor Anabaptists of any stripe, but my generation largely embraced a radically “hippie” culture, which probably contributed to my disposition toward taking a radical approach to Christianity as well. By “radical” and “Anabaptist” I mean, essentially taking an uncompromising approach to compliance with the teachings of Jesus (especially in the Sermon on the Mount), and seeing Jesus’ behavior (with circumstantial modifications) as normative for His followers as well. As a result, I began my ministry as an absolute pacifist. My later studies moderated this position.

I first became aware of the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit in 1970, and was very open to hearing anything I could learn from people more experienced than myself in these matters. Because of my desire to experience any legitimate phenomenon that God might wish for Christians to experience, as a teenager, I was susceptible to a number of passing charismatic fads—especially, elements of the “Word of Faith,” “deliverance ministries,” and the “shepherding/discipleship movement.”

In 1971, someone put into my hands some little books by Kenneth Hagen, and I became (briefly) convinced of the “Word of Faith” teaching—at least the part about healing (not so much the prosperity doctrine). Fortunately, I had already been reading books like those of Corrie Ten Boom, Richard Wurmbrand, Watchman Nee, Brother Andrew, Hannah Hurnard, and *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*—so I had already imbibed a fairly scriptural attitude toward suffering, which probably made it harder for the “Word of Faith” ideas to take a permanent hold on my sympathies.

I partially embraced this view of things for nearly a year before I began, through my own Bible studies, to see the fallacy of these interpretations of scripture. As a result, by the time I was 18, I had abandoned Word of Faith teachings, and began teaching against them.

Around the same time, I also became aware of the phenomena of *demonization* (demon-possession) and Satan’s general activities. This interest was sparked by a couple of incidents when I was about 18 or 19. In one case, a close friend had a terrifying encounter with what seemed to be a manifested demon. In another case, I was asked to drive demons out of an afflicted girl. I felt that I was completely unprepared for the latter experience, and only succeeded by my child-like trust in God. Afterward, I began to comb through the scriptures for light on this subject. I became briefly impressed with certain “deliverance ministries” that seemed to be getting results in helping people with problems that were apparently caused by demons. I had previously been taught, at Calvary Chapel, that Christians are invulnerable to demonization, but I did my own research and finally concluded that the Bible does not directly address that question, one way or another.

In the mid-seventies, I briefly encountered the shepherding/discipleship movement. I was attending the Jesus-People fellowship in Santa Cruz (before the establishment of a Calvary Chapel in that town), before it became part of a network of churches submitted to “shepherds” in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The leaders in this movement wished to micromanage every detail of the lives of their followers. I soon found myself disagreeing with the concept of one Christian dominating the faith and life of other Christians. I got myself kicked-out of the church for disagreeing with our pastor, in 1975.

My experience with the shepherding movement served to strengthen my determination never again to let another man do my Christian thinking for me. I realized, of course, that this would place the burden of thinking things through scripturally upon my own shoulders, but I did not object to taking this responsibility. In the course of the next several years of studying the scriptures, I reached new conclusions about a number of biblical doctrines and practices. My ideas changed very gradually,

partly because of my essentially conservative temperament (another way of saying “I am a slow learner”), and partly because I had no teachers or authors guiding me in my development.

I had never heard that my views on “the end times” belonged to a certain camp, called “dispensationalism.” My impression was that I “just believed the Bible” on such matters. Between the years 1974 and 1976, I gradually began to acknowledge weaknesses in my belief in a pre-tribulational rapture, which I finally abandoned in favor of post-tribulationism. This awareness, along with a view of Israel modified by the teachings of Christ and the apostles, had caused me to move from Dispensationalism to what, unbeknown to me at the time, is called Historic Premillennialism. I knew of the existence of no other than premillennial paradigms.

Next, my views underwent a gradual change with reference to the millennium, from 1978 to 1979. These changes occurred in a piecemeal fashion. A change would begin with the realization that I had been ignoring some significant phrase or verse on a topic, or that I had been told that a passage meant something, which it really did not say. The combination of numerous such discoveries would eventually form a different paradigm from the one I had formerly assumed to be correct. Years later, I would lay out the different options in my book, *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Thomas Nelson, 1997).

By 1979, I had become an Amillennialist —though I did not yet know there was such a name for it. I had never, to my knowledge, encountered anyone holding or advocating the view. I held this opinion secretly for many months, fearing that I had inadvertently become a heretic, and assuming that I could never again publicly teach on eschatology. I came “out of the closet” with this view only after meeting another minister who held the same view, and who was able to document to me that this was the primary, historical position in Christian orthodoxy.

Becoming a “partial preterist” came later, and was a slower process. It is the first of my changed views that required the influence of other authors to bring me around. After becoming Amillennial, I still remained (somewhat inconsistently) a futurist in my approach to Revelation and the Olivet Discourse. I knew no other options. In 1980, someone lent me William Hendrickson’s book, *More Than Conquerors*, and it convinced me that the Idealist View (I did not yet know this name for it) of Revelation was more sound biblically than was Futurism—and more consistent with the Amillennial outlook I had already adopted. So, for a few years (roughly 1980 through 1983) I held the Idealist View of Revelation, but still knew only the futurist view of Matthew 24.

In 1982, I was given a copy of Jay Adams’s *The Time is at Hand*, a small paperback, which presented the partial preterist view of both Revelation and the Olivet Discourse. I had never heard of the possibility that these prophecies had already been fulfilled in AD 70, but the evidence was impressive, and I was almost persuaded.

As impressed as I was by Adams’ information, I drifted back to the security of the familiar, which, by this time, was still the Idealist View of Revelation.

After founding the Great Commission School, in 1983, I acquired many more books for my teaching prep, and these included books by J. Stuart Russell, Marcellus Kik, David Chilton, Gary DeMar, Kenneth Gentry and other partial-preterists. The extrabiblical, historical information I gleaned from these authors overwhelmed my resistance, and I was compelled to embrace Partial Preterism. I never went so far as to become a Postmillennialist, like most of these authors, but I did become a more-optimistic Amillennialist than before.

Of course, these gradual changes in my eschatology could not help but be accompanied by associated changes in my understanding of such matters as “the kingdom of God,” “the church,” and the status of the nation Israel—all of which had already been morphed into views consistent with

Amillennialism, even prior to my adoption of that view—and, in fact, had helped to precipitate that transition.

I became aware of the brewing controversy between Calvinism and Arminianism only in the mid-eighties, when many of the Christians I knew began to read R.C. Sproul, and were consequently inspired to pick fights with non-Calvinists. I was never a Calvinist in my beliefs, but did not see it as a subject worthy of much excitement or controversy. However, when Calvinists began visiting our campus to proselytize our students, as director of the school, I was obliged to address the errors of the Calvinist proof-texting. This confrontation led me to read the best Calvinist authors I could find, in order to learn their best arguments. Seeing the weakness of their exegesis served to further strengthen my rejection of that scheme.

My most recent theological shift seems to be concerning the nature and purpose of “hell.” As long ago as the late eighties, I became aware that two of my most-admired evangelical leaders, John R.W. Stott and Clark Pinnock, had taken the surprising position that hell is a place of annihilation, not eternal torment. I could not immediately accept this (being fundamentally conservative by temperament), but it lodged in my mind. Somewhere along the way, I also heard that certain respected evangelical writers, like Hannah Whitall Smith and George MacDonald, had been Christian Universalists. This bothered me, somewhat, but, by this time, I had become much more open-minded to letting others reach their own conclusions, and was not as greatly alarmed as I would have been a decade earlier.

For some time, it seemed to me that the safest position to take on hell is the traditional view of eternal torment (we might as well prepare for the worst possibility!). I found it fairly easy to remain dispassionate on the subject while presenting all three options to callers on my radio program, and I felt that the evidence for the three views was about equally distributed, allowing me to retain the traditional view with a good conscience, by default.

As I write today, however, I have become less and less impressed with the nature of the biblical evidence for the traditional view, and more concerned about its implications with reference to the character of God. I have moved from my former confidence that the view of endless torment has strong scriptural support. In fact, it seems to be the weakest of the three views, from the standpoint of biblical exegesis. I am still in the process of deciding between the two alternatives to the traditional view. Both of the alternatives have respectable biblical support, neither provides a total refutation of the other. In 2013, I wrote a book comparing and examining the evidence for each of the three views. The second edition of this book is entitled, *“Why Hell? Three Christian Views Critically Examined”* (Zondervan, 2024).

Some might conclude that I am theologically unstable, “tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.” Actually, since the mid-seventies, there has been no “to-and-fro-ness” about it. I have not gone back-and-forth in my beliefs. Rather, it has been a linear development. Each well-studied change I have made has been precipitated by the previous ones, and has been a necessary advance encouraged by those that preceded them. Personally, of course, I regard the sum of these shifts as “growth” and “progress.” I do not expect all who read this to agree with me in this assessment.

### **“Living by Faith”**

My life has been a true adventure with God, since I have lived most of my adult life “by faith.” From my teens, I have taken the lives of Jesus and the apostles (as well as spiritual giants, such as George Müller and Hudson Taylor) as my inspiration and role models of financing the work of the ministry, and have seen awesome answers to prayer and timely financial providences literally hundreds of times through my whole adult life. Although I have lived most of my life without predictable support, having never requested remuneration for any ministry I have ever performed, nor been on the payroll of any church or Christian organization, nor sent out financial appeals, nor even let anyone

but God know our personal needs, God has seen to it that my family and I have never lacked for anything that is necessary for a relatively comfortable life. Very many times, we have gotten down to our last dollar, without a hint of where the next provision might come from—only to have the needed amount arrive from some unexpected donor, who knew nothing about our shortage. Sometimes we have fared comfortably, and other times we have lived not far from the poverty line. Most of the time, God's provision has been just right—and never too little!

Living like this requires that one take seriously Paul's description of the normative Christian attitude about such matters: "Having food and clothing, we will with these things be content." We have lived almost entirely debt-free, because I believe that one who is content will live within his means, and will not obligate God to provide future finances for present needs. The stories of God's timely provision to me and to our family are a multitude. I'd love to tell some of them in detail another time.

## Conclusion



Much more could be said (not all good) about my background, but that would require a book-length treatment. My life has been a wild ride, primarily characterized by gratifying spiritual benefits, often mixed with great personal tragedies. I have also made lamentable mistakes. I wish I could say that I have served Jesus flawlessly as a faithful slave, but this would be a misrepresentation of the facts. While I am sure that my zeal for God has been genuine, and my intentions good, my judgment has not always been wise or admirable, resulting in a few monumental errors and sins. There are people in my past who could testify that they have been hurt by my insensitivity and my careless actions. Nonetheless, God has been unaccountably merciful to me. I have, at some times, been pummeled by the devil because of my faith, and at other times chastened by God because of my failures. On balance, I feel that I have received many mercies, and few afflictions.

I have been given five wonderful children, and two step-sons—all of whom are now adults. I desire that they may all see the wisdom in a life devoted to Christ, and will experience the kind of relationship with God that it has been my privilege to enjoy. My goal is not to seek personal fulfillment, success or happiness, but, instead, to hear Him who commissioned me someday say, "Well done, faithful servants!" I am sure that I have made enough mistakes to disqualify me for such commendation, but I trust in the grace of God that I will finish strong and reach the end with as few additional regrets as possible.