

O Magnify the Lord with Me, and Let Us Exalt His Name Together, Part 1

by Albert N. Martin

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In the light of my soon departure from you, my fellow pastors--and they are my pastors, and they shepherd me, and when the Scripture says obey them that have rule over you, that means when Pastor Smith and Carlson ask me to do something that's not contrary to the Word of God, I have no choice in the matter. And they recently felt that in the light of my soon departure, I ought to take two Sunday school sessions in order to recount something of the grace and goodness of God to me in two broad areas. They ask that I take the hour this morning and seek to convey how the grace of God has been operative in my personal life, or in more common nomenclature, to give my testimony, and then, God willing, next week how that grace has been operative in the establishing, developing, and maintaining the life and ministry of Trinity Baptist Church over the past 46 years.

Now I want to say just a few words with respect to my desire as I obey my pastors. In Psalm 34:3, the psalmist says, "Oh magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together." Well, if God is infinite, how can you magnify Him? You cannot magnify the infinite. But yet you can. When you take a magnifying glass and place it on small print, we don't change the print. We just make it bigger to our vision. And this is what the psalmist is saying. "Oh magnify the Lord with me." Let Him be bigger than our perception. We cannot magnify Him in His essence. But in our perception of Him and of His grace and of His goodness, we can magnify Him. And in so doing, we will be exalting His name together. And that's the desire of my heart, that as I seek to recount something of God's gracious dealings with me, even prior to my conversion, and certainly since my conversion 46 plus years ago, that we together may magnify the Lord and exalt His name. And then, since we've had some of the young people (we won't call you children here), it's my passion and my desire that verse 8 of the same Psalm would be realized: "Oh taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that takes refuge in Him."

Since God was pleased to take hold of me as a teenager, 17 years of age, coming up within a few months of being 18, I trust that some of you who are just preteens and teenagers who have yet to embrace Christ and know the blessedness of sins forgiven, of purpose and direction in life oriented to the Word of God, that you would, as a result of what I share of God's gracious dealings with me, taste, and tasting, you would see in your experience that the Lord is good. And blessed, perfectly happy, is the man, the woman, the young man, the young woman that takes refuge in Him. And in all that I say this morning, there is a perspective that is disciplined, I trust, and shaped by two text from the New Testament.

In 1 Corinthians 4:7, the Apostle asks the question, "Who makes you to differ? And what have you that you have not received?" When I think that standing before you this morning at age 74, I have a brother in his late 60s who is not a Christian. We were conceived by the same mother and father. We shared the same womb. We were under the same instruction. And yet he is still in his sins. And I've known the grace of God for 56 years of my life. And when I face that question, "Who makes you to differ? And what have you that you have not received?", the answer is God, in sovereign grace, has made me to differ. And anything I have is the grace of God.

And that leads to the second, where Paul is describing what he was able to accomplish as an apostle. Lest anyone think that he was boasting in himself, he said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "I am what I am by the grace of God." When I sit in my chair in my study, where I read my Bible for my own soul's feeding and where I pray, and periodically I try to think what I would be at age 74, what I know about myself apart from the grace of God, I weep, I tremble. I'd be an ugly, ugly specimen of humanity. And whatever is of any worth, I am what I am by the grace of God, and by the grace of God alone.

So in these two sessions, mandated by my fellow pastors, I will seek to divide the things I say into three major categories. First of all, my birth to my conversion and my first months as a babe in Christ. Secondly, my college years to my settlement here in North Jersey. And then thirdly (that will be reserved for next week), my labors for the past 46 years here in this part of God's vineyard. My birth to my conversion: that takes us from ancient history for some of you--1934 to 1951-52.

On April 11, 1934, I was brought forth into the world in Alexandria, Virginia, the second child of George and Mildred Martin. Alexandria, Virginia is just a suburb of Washington, D.C. But when I'm among bluebird southerners, I bring out my pedigree and say I was born in Virginia, and that gives me some standing. Immediately, I don't tell them Alexandria unless they ask me, because that's just barely over the Mason-Dixon line. But I am a native born Virginian. And that gives me particular standing, as many of you know, with a certain preacher very dear to many of us.

My father and mother were Salvation Army officers. And for those of you that know nothing of the Salvation Army, let me say this very briefly and succinctly. The Salvation Army is a religious organization that functions with military rather than Biblical structures. They have no pastors; they do not practice the ordinances of baptism or the Lord's Supper. The men who act as pastors or officers are commissioned as lieutenants, as captains, as majors all the way up to generals. So there is a military structure to the leadership.

Well, let me say a word about my father and how he came to be a Salvation Army officer. You can't understand me apart from that fact. He was born and reared in Massachusetts. His own father died when he was only 13 years of age; he had to leave school and go to work at a shoe factory in Manchester, New Hampshire. His mother was a real Christian who sought to rear him according to her light and understanding of the Word of God. And my dad was converted when he was 18 years of age. I don't know how they were connected with the Salvation Army, but they were. And in that framework, if anyone shows a real passion to love Christ and serve Christ, they are encouraged to become a Salvation Army officer. And that means they have to go to their training college, which is like a Bible school, which at that time was in New York City. And so my dad went to the training college and

finished the course of study, and then he was commissioned, not ordained--military framework, remember. You are commissioned as a lieutenant. And in that commissioning, he was eventually sent to New Hampshire, where he met a young teenage woman who caught his eye and captured his heart. And so at age 24, and she only age 18, they were married. And shortly thereafter, my dad was sent. You take the directives of those that are above you--it's an army. When the captain speaks to the lieutenant, the lieutenant throws a salute, clicks his heels and says, "I, I, sir." And so my father was sent to Alexandria, Virginia. That's why I was born there.

Now a word about my mother: she was the oldest girl of Swedish immigrants who settled in Concord, New Hampshire. A family of 14 were born of that union; 9 of them lived to maturity. My mother was also converted in her teenage years. And so when Dad pursued her, she gave her consent, and as I said, she was but 18 when they were married. Her first child was born, my sister Joyce, whom many of you know, when my mother was but 19. She was 21 when I was born.

Now how did I end up with the name Albert Newton Martin? Many of you didn't know what the N stands for. My father thought that a father who named his child after him and made him a junior or the third or the fourth was the height of--whatever--it was negative. He had no sympathy, so I was not going to be George Albert Martin the Second. So he took his middle name and gave that to me as my first name. Well, my dad's mother was a Newton, but the Newtons comprised of just two girls. So the Newton name was going to die. So to make old great granddad happy, they named their firstborn son Albert Newton Martin. And old great granddad was greatly pleased. I've seen pictures of him; he had a long white beard. And it tickles me to think that in some way, apart from my knowledge of it, I was able to make the old Christian man a glad man.

Shortly after I was born, in just a few months, my dad left the Salvation Army out of conscientious, principled convictions. I won't go into what they were. Well, what was he to do? Here was a young man with no marketable skill in the middle of the depression. Well, a former classmate in his training college years there in New York was stationed in Stamford, Connecticut. He was the presiding officer in the church there. (They called it a corps--military framework, military terminology.) And he called my dad and said, "George A. [as he was affectionately known], there's a man who has just invented an electric shaver. [His name was Colonial Schick.] And so Schick Electric Shaver has set up a plant, and they are hiring. And I think I can put in a word for you and secure a job for you." So my dad with his two little ones and his bride made their way to Stamford, Connecticut, and he started working in the graveyard shift (12 midnight to 8 in the morning). 8 hours standing at a punch press. One of the levers was the safety lever. The metal was placed under the press; the other brought it down to stamp the metal. And that's how my dad began.

No college, no high school degree, but my father was a man who exemplified the principle that a man does what a man is supposed to do. He doesn't talk about it; he doesn't whine about it. He sets his face to do it. And knowing that God had given him a wife and two children, and he had a responsibility to provide for them, he started at that job. And over the next few years, he went to evening school and got his high school equivalent diploma. And then he began to take courses in management until (to make a very long story short) he became production control manager over the entire plant and finished his career there after 38 years with a sterling testimony of the grace of God by his uprightness, integrity, and diligence. And through all of that,

he provided for his growing family. In fact, it's been humorous over the years, when people are trying to get to know me, they would ask, "How many children are in your family?" And I would say "10 of us." Then they would say, "And what did your father do?" I would say, "He was production control manager." You see why people would laugh. And they would ask those questions together many, many times. (I didn't line them up.) And I would say he's production control manager at Schick Electric Shaver.

Well, that's how Albert N. came into the world. That's something of my roots and of my background. And during the early years of my life, there were two major influences, and I want to spend a few minutes highlighting the nature of those influences: the influence of my Godly parents and the influence of continuing to attend the Salvation Army. For when we went to Stamford, though my father had relinquished his commission and given up his title as Captain George Martin, we still attended the Salvation Army corps, the little building on a side street in downtown Stamford, Connecticut. My father was an accomplished musician, so he was the bandmaster. (Every corps tried to have a band.) He could pick up any brass instrument and not only play it (from a coronet to a trombone to a baritone horn). He could transpose at sight. He was an accomplished musician, and again, I'm very thankful for that in my genes and in my blood. But anyway, there's the influence of my parental discipline, training and molding, and then the influence of the Salvation Army.

What were the things my parents focused upon in parenting me? And for these things, I shall be eternally grateful as I look back upon my life. I was reared in a home where I was constantly reminded that my will was to be subject to the will of my parents. I cannot remember once ever saying the word "no" to my parents. I may have done it when I was a real small infant, and probably got thoroughly spanked for it. But the word "no" in our home was like a four letter word. You did not dare to challenge the will of your mother and your father. And I'm thankful that that kind of training has made it relatively easy for me to function in a plurality of eldership, where I am as a Christian man in this church subject to my elders. I recognize their authority, my respect for the law of the land, etc. My parents were committed to conquer, not to break, but to conquer the will if their children.

Furthermore, as a child came along about every two years (and eventually there were 10 of us), we were not permitted to hold grudges one against another. If one of us had a spat with another, my mother would drop whatever she was doing and dealt with us until we could look each other in the eye, acknowledge our fault, ask and receive forgiveness, and walk away with a smile. Grudges were not tolerated in our household.

Furthermore, there was a great concern to teach faithfulness, diligence, and responsibility. In the public school that I went to, where there were tons of common grace compared to what things are today (we said the Lord's Prayer every morning in our public school), along with those influences, these disciplines and graces of faithfulness, diligence, and responsibility, were pounded into us.

Some of you have heard me say the words, "doing what you don't want to do develops character; a job worth doing is worth doing well." How many times I was assigned a task and would say, "But Mom, you know I'd rather...." She'd say, "I know you'd rather do this son, but doing things you don't like to do develops character." And so much of those things became a part of me that I've kidded my mother, even

in more recent years, and said, "You know, Ma, there are times when you are a pain in the neck to me." And some of you who know my mother, she can take that and laugh. I'm sitting at my desk at 9:30, Saturday night; any sane man in his 60s or 70s ought to go downstairs and go to bed, and you're still in my ear telling me, "A job worth doing is worth doing well." And I'm not satisfied that what I've prepared for my people is my best, so I remain at that desk until I can leave with a good conscience.

We got grades in that public school, a letter grade that told your academic accomplishment and then a number grade that told your effort. If you came home with a C1, all was well. If you came home with an A3, you were in trouble. I can remember my mom and dad saying, "Look, that first thing, the letter, that shows what God gave you. You can't take any credit for that. The second shows what you're doing with what God gave you, and that is the issue you need to be concerned about." I'm grateful to God for those lessons.

Then, fourthly, I'm grateful for their faithfulness to my soul. I can remember so often when doing this or doing that that was contrary to Biblical norms, my mother saying to me, "Son, when you get converted, thus and thus will be so." They had very poor teaching, but they understood that if you get right with God and become a Christian, your life is changed. And no matter how much I may have made professions of faith and fooled others, I didn't fool my mother in particular. And when they would say to me, "Now, son, when everyone's gone to bed tonight, we want you to stay up. Mom and Dad have something to say to you", I knew it was mini-judgment day. One of the neighbors had ratted on me. They had heard me use some foul language. Or they had seen me do something that wasn't what a little boy should be doing. My parents were faithful to my soul with the light they had. They would point out my sins and say, "Son, you did this because of who you are. And you need to be right with God. You need to be converted. You need to go to Christ." And though their understanding of the doctrines of justification and adoption was very clouded because there was no preaching in the Salvation Army, nothing that would open up these grand central nerve centers of the Gospel, they were faithful to my soul, not only in their public instruction of me, but in their prayers. They wrestled with God for my conversion.

Fifthly, they taught us contentment and gratitude for what we had. Looking back, we would be classified without any question as being poor, but we never felt poor. My mother could take the collar of a winter jacket and build a whole new jacket around the fur collar--an amazing seamstress. Her father was a tailor, and what she was able to do was amazing. So even though I was born in the depression, lived through the war years (for 7 years we had no car), we never felt deprived. You walked where you had to go, or you took the bus. And sitting around the table during the war years, if any one of us made a complaint that we hadn't had meat for a couple of days, or, "Why are we having goulash again?", my father would take the *New York News* (Stamford is just 30 miles up the line on the Connecticut coast line) and hold up pictures of the devastation in Europe and say, "This is not what you're experiencing. I don't want to hear any complaint. Food is on your table. Eat it with gratitude." Now that's a different universe for you kids sitting here, I know. But that's the world in which I was reared, in which we were taught contentment and gratitude for what we had.

Then further, we were taught that God's Word governs who we are and what we do. After the war when things began to get a little flush, I'll never forget, we got a 1946 Buick. It had that tier-shaped fender; it was jet black. And as far as we were

concerned, that was like a Cadillac or a Mercedes Benz. And with that, there began to be a little bit of affluence, and some of the neighbors were getting ahead of us. And we would make some comment to my dad and say, "Well, Dad, so and so has this; so and so has that." He'd look at us and say, "What's that have to do with the Martin household? End of discussion." And I can remember my dad pointing to a threadbare couch and saying, "Now, son, that couch is threadbare, but it's ours. We don't owe a dime on it. And when we have the money to buy a new one, we will. But until then, you can sit on it, knowing no one will come to the door to reposes it." Debt, sin, devil, hell were all synonyms in the world in which I was reared. And I thank God for it. I've never become a slave to a credit card. If it can't be used as a cash flow instrument, I'd cut it up and burn it. I thank God I that was trained to live with the means that God put in my hand, not the means that I in la-la land think the credit card will give me. Dear people, I'm just telling you the facts. That's who this man is. And if you find him a bit impatient with this spend, spend, spend mentality, you know why. It's so contrary to everything I was reared to be by the grace of God.

Then I'm very thankful for the restraining influence of fixed rules in our house. Now my parents have never read Josh Harris' book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. If they had, when I got to dating age, I'm confident there's no way they would have let me get on that stupid treadmill. But they didn't. They were going with the light they had. But I tell you, there were fixed rules. One of them I remember. I had an 11:00 o'clock curfew for Saturday night. And one of my girlfriends lived along a bus route, and there were times the bus was a few minutes late. And when that bus would let me off at the head of Soundview Avenue, I believe more than once I broke any existing 440 record, because if you came in at 11:01, you may have well been staying out till 1:00 o'clock in the morning. There was no latitude. 11:00 o'clock is 11:00 o'clock. Some of the people wonder why I'm such a stickler about clocks telling the truth. Well, maybe that's where I got it because a clock did not lie. And I'm thankful for all the sins that were avoided in terms of my parents' insistence that I not be given leave to use the car for my dates--I thank God for that. I tremble to think what I would be if I had had the use of a car as a dating teenager with all my raging hormones.

Well, those are some of the things that were brought into the texture of my soul in my life through the parental influence that God graciously gave me. But what influences were brought to bear through the Salvation Army? Most of those, sad to say, are negative. The Salvation Army is committed theologically to real Wesleyan Armenianism. That is, they believe your decision gets you in. And as your decision gets you in, it can get you out--that you can be saved and lost and saved again. They had in the cycle of their program every quarter (once every three months) what they called Decision Sunday. And on Decision Sunday, everyone who was not a Christian was called to come forward and kneel at what in the Salvation Army is called the penitent form. (In some places, they would call it the altar.) At least they had the idea that if you're going to get right with God through Christ, there's going to be repentance. And I don't know how many times in those early years where God had given me a constitutionally sensitive conscience, I came forward with tears. And I can remember singing many, many times

Into my heart, into my heart,
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus;
Come in today,
Come in to stay,
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.

I'd roll up my sleeves and say I'm going to start reading my Bible; I'm going to start acting like a Christian. One time it lasted all of six months, but there was no regenerating grace. There was no real preaching. There was no expounding of the Gospel. And there was a very high mountain of legalism in the Salvation Army (no alcohol, no tobacco, no movies, no this, no that). Some of those things, again, I am thankful for--that I can live as an adult male in touch with my society and not be a movie addict. I am thankful to God for that. My parents insisted on that as well. And in my home, I can count on one hand with maybe a finger or two missing the movies we were allowed to see as children. There was Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and one cowboy movie--that was it. And I don't think my life is all warped and twisted because I've not been a movie addict. I don't think any of you that have sat under my ministry would say I'm out of touch with society. So that was one of the good things. But it was grievous that I did not have men of God whose lives were such that I could emulate. There was not much of any positive contribution in all of those years.

Now then, I want to move out of all those infant years and the primary influence of my parents and some of the influence of the Salvation Army into what I'm calling the years of transition leading to my conversion and my early days as a Christian. During junior high school, I began to be obsessed with sports, and I did well in them. But with that obsession with sports and an effort to fill up this empty, Christless soul, there was an increased misery because I could not enter into the sins that my buddies did and enjoy it. My conscience screamed at me. I'd lie on my bed at night and say, "O God, if I died tonight, I'd end up in hell." And then I would think of hell--forever and ever and ever--and my mind would feel it came to the breaking point as I tried to think of eternity. And many a night I prayed, "O God, don't let me die tonight, and help me to get to sleep."

As I got into high school, for in Stamford, you went from 7 to 9 (which was junior high school, and then you went to the central high school), more and more, sports became my life, especially football and baseball. And then from being a diligent honor student, I began to be content with mediocrity in my studies and had no motivation for excellence. And yet in the providence of God, I was spared any involvement in alcohol, drugs, illicit sex. I thank God for that; however, I cultivated a filthy mind, a dirty tongue, and with that, a growing sense of misery and emptiness.

It was during that period, somewhere in my sophomore year, that my parents had had it with the Salvation Army and the lack of Biblical teaching, and they began to attend a Baptist church there in Stamford (First Baptist Church) where there was at least some semblance of Biblical teaching. My dad was given the men's class, and he taught that class. I have something of my dad's preaching genes in me. I didn't realize it until I had been preaching for years, that I rise on my toes, and apparently that's something I inherited from my dad that I can remember when he was teaching that class.

In that setting--and this is very, very significant--in my senior year of high school, there was a young Scotsman who had come over from Scotland to be a professional dancer with his wife, and he had been marvelously converted and somehow ended up in that Baptist church. And he was a flame with zeal for Christ. He could preach the Gospel to a lamp post. Anything that stood erect was fair game for Joe Mahady. Well, Joe saw some of us young people who were out in never-never land spiritually, and he latched on to us, and he began to preach the hide out of us. Some of you young people who resent it when people get in your face, thank God for people who

love you enough to get in your face. Joe would get in your face--I can still see him. He had a mustache and he stuttered, but he would confront you with God and His Word and the need to repent and deal with sin. And God used that man to draw together several young men and women. And during that period, somewhere between Thanksgiving Day, 1951, when I played my last football game there in Stamford and the awards dinner in January, God did the work. I don't remember any details of what specific issue God pressed, what were the circumstances. But all I know is this: Christ was now precious to me; prayer was my life's breath; my Bible came alive to me, and I was a new creature in Christ.

During that period, I was working for Western Union, peddling one of my sister's bikes. It was humbling as a boy to be riding a girl's bike all over Stamford, Connecticut, a blue, balloon-tire bike. I can still see it in my mind's eye. And I know that God had done a work in me because back then you had real paper telegrams that you delivered for 35 cents an hour plus tips, which were very sparse. I would give out a tract--with a telegram, you get a tract. Well, in the midst of that labor, one morning I came into the Western Union office and the gal at the front desk said, "The manager wants to see you." I said, "Uh oh, the jugs up. Some of the customers had called in and said, 'You've got somebody giving out religious literature--you better watch it.'" So I went in trembling, and he looked at me and said, "Are you Albert N. Martin?" And I said, "Yes, sir." He said,

"Well, I want to tell you, last night, we sent in by our tele tap wire an article to the *New York Times*. And in that article, it talks about a former football player who had become very religious and was having an impact upon the students of Stamford High School. Young man, I want to commend you. With all of the nonsense going on with people, I thank you for the things you are doing."

Well, of course, I breathed a sigh of relief, because God--and I can't go into the details--God shook that high school of 1,500 people. There were about a half a dozen of us that God had laid hold of; we would meet two and three times a week to pray for an hour or two at a stretch. Three and four times a week we were on the street corner preaching. And that school was aware that they had this cadre of religious nuts. We all got Thompson Chain-Reference Bibles; they're bigger than this ASV. And we would have a rubber band around them; tuck them under our arm. And when we walked the halls of Stamford High School, that was our badge. I had a blue moroccan leather Thompson Chain-Reference Bible that I wore out in about three years. That was a mighty movement of the Spirit of God for which, again, I shall be eternally grateful, because it stamped me with the conviction that the kingdom of God is like a man who finds a treasure in the field, and when he finds it, it becomes his obsession. And Christ became my obsession. He became the obsession of these other young men.

Then in one snowy night in February of 1952, two months before my 18th birthday--that night I cannot forget, because I regarded as the night when God laid His hand upon me in a peculiar way to preach the Gospel. What had happened was this: as we began to witness to other young people in that Baptist church--and we probably weren't the wisest and the most tactful, but we knew what God had done for us. The Salvation Army said you can get it and lose it. The Baptist church said make a decision when you're a toddler and you'll never lose it. So we knew all around us were these kids who had been decisioned. They were no more saved than the devil, and we began to tell them so. Well, they began to get uncomfortable; some of them

were deacon's daughters. And so we were kind of shoved out of that church situation.

At that time, there was a little Gospel mission meeting on the second floor in downtown Stamford, Connecticut, where two old white-haired saints had been praying for years for an outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the young people of Stamford. How they contacted us, I can't remember, but they recognized God's hand was on us. And they said to us, "Young men, you need to get out on the street corner and preach." And respecting their age and their wisdom, we said, "Well, that's what we must do."

The first night was going to be that night in February of 1952. I'll never forget it. It's there before my mind; right now I could describe the crunching of the snow under my feet, the blue mohair overcoat I wore. I didn't take the bus downtown that night. I walked, and in some ways, I felt I was walking my last mile to execution. Because on that Thursday night when we were to hold our first prayer meeting, I knew Thursday night all the stores in Stamford downtown remained open. And we were going to have our street meeting right in front of the Legit Drug Store, where I knew all of my football buddies would be hanging out. To use contemporary term, they'd be chilling out together. There would be Mike Potenza, and there would be Joe Renaldi, and there would be Louie Hardball, the guys that would open up holes for me when I ran as a running back--they'd all be there. And I knew they had heard certain things in the high school about us getting religion, but now it would be clear as the noonday sun. And that night when I stood in that little circle (probably about a half a dozen of us) with a leather New Testament, I don't know what I said, but when I looked those guys in the eye and told them what Christ had done for me and what Christ had become to me and what He could become to them, the only analogy I know is this twofold analogy: It's like God came with holy scissors and cut the last bands that tied me to the smiles and the approval of men. Then God stood behind me and took a steal rod and drove it down my back that I should never fear the faces of men when I spoke the Word of God. I believe, having no former church association, no elders to guide me or assess me (God deals with us as and where we are), that was my call to preach. From that time on, I never had any question what I would do with my life. It was an assumption. And when people would ask me, "How did you receive your call to preach?" I'd say, "I never thought about it. I just know that's what I'm to do. That's what God brought me into the world to do."

So during that period through that spring and summer, that little fellowship grew to be about a dozen or so. We tasted reality in a way that some who were a part of that and saw it (my sisters Joyce and Lois and others) say that in all their pilgrimage, they'd never seen anything like it since and never before. You see, young people when they got together, they weren't talking about the latest movie. They weren't passing around the latest CD. They were in their Bibles studying the Word of God, on their knees praying for an hour or two at a time. Dear people, that's a reality. I've tasted that. And if you wonder why my heart breaks when I see such mediocrity, such borderline worldliness, I wonder, has the Holy Spirit ever made Christ precious to your heart? Has He become the pearl of great price for which you've sold all that you might have Him?

We continued those street meetings; we continued to have opportunities to preach in different places. And my aunt up in Concord, New Hampshire, who was a Child Evangelism worker, heard through my mother what the Lord was doing in my life and

the lives of these other young men and women, and she said, "Well, they might be able to be a help to our young people in our church." So she asked me if I would come up and preach to the young people's group in the First Baptist Church of Concord, New Hampshire.

When I went up (I shall never forget it), I was introduced to the president of the young people's group, who happened to be a 20-year-old, brown-eyed, beautiful young woman, who the year before had been converted in nurses training in Boston, Massachusetts. That was Marilyn. And this was a matter of infatuation at first sight--mindless, utterly irrational, total infatuation. However, with no Josh Harris to guide us, with very little parental or pastoral guidance, you know how Marilyn and I got to know one another? By singing hymns in my grandmother's home, studying our Bibles, going out on the street passing out tracts. And then, because we had both been accepted at Bob Jones University prior to meeting one another, we would sit in the dating parlor. I remember going through the book of Colossians, and we talked and prayed and got to know one another's deepest spiritual hunger and passion. Then God separated us for three years, and we courted by mail and were eventually married in 1956. But that's just a little bit of an aside.

I went off to Bob Jones University because up there in Connecticut, it was the only place we knew about that trained men for the ministry. They had a preacher boys class. I attended there for two years and then transferred to Columbia Bible College, and after two years graduated with God's help with honors. And during that two years (because this helps you to know who I am), I was not sitting around doing the typical college thing. I became involved in a little mission church in Augusta, Georgia. And during two years, I would go down every Sunday, get up at 4:30 in the morning, drive down Wednesdays to lead a prayer meeting. And during that time, I had the privilege of seeking to shepherd and pastor these people in what would be called the white trash section of Augusta, Georgia. And while the guys were blowing time with this avocation and this diversion, I was riveted to my desk studying my Greek Testament that I might know how to preach the Word of God to those dear people the next day. I spent one summer living among them, laboring among them. And I thank God for what He did in terms of that experience.

Well, after graduating from Columbia Bible College, they asked me to stay on a year as assistant to the Dean of Men with a view to working into a more permanent faculty position. And in the providence of God, I just felt that I could not accept that opportunity, and so I declined it. And that then led, again, in the providence of God to an itinerant ministry. I was not a church member anywhere. I was not accountable to anyone formally. I had no light, no teaching on the doctrine of the church. I received none at Bob Jones, none at Columbia Bible college. I was in a very vulnerable position, but God was gracious to keep me by His grace as I went out into that itinerant ministry for five years. And it was while I was in that ministry that God put some providences together that resulted in my coming to North Jersey.

Now in the light of the time constraint, I'm going to hold off till next week telling you what were the providences that brought me to North Jersey. And what I want to do is highlight the principle issues that God taught me in those days of my spiritual infancy.

Number one: He taught me the worthiness of Christ to be followed at any cost. My first serious opposition as a baby Christian three months out of the womb did not come from the high school students. It didn't come from outside. It came from my

own father, my father who had prayed for me, my father who had instructed me. But the things God was doing in my life and some of these other young people was outside the sphere of his experience, and he feared that we were going into some kind of fanatical orbit. And my own father opposed me. And I shall never forget the night when after my father and the pastor tried to dissuade me from being "sold out to Christ" in the way that we were, I went in on my knees in my bedroom and was weeping before God saying, "O God, do I listen to them? Lord, You've worked in my heart; you've made Christ precious to me. There's nothing I can do but speak His truth." And my dear mother came in a knelt next to me, put her arm around me and said, "Son, don't turn back. This is what I've prayed for all your life." I felt the sword of division in my own family. But Christ was precious. I felt it later when I left Bob Jones University, and the president himself opposed that leave. And he said that a day would come when I would come back regretting the decision I had made. Dear people, when I call you to sold-out devotion to Christ above mother, father, brother, sister, and your own life, I'm not calling you to something that I don't know the sword point in my own heart.

I learned in those early days the futility of any shortcuts in the Christian life. I was a chronic asthmatic doing construction work during the summer months; I knew what it was to sit up in a chair half the night trying to breathe. And the next morning, nothing in me wanted to rise a pray and read. I remembered those lessons: "Albert, if you don't rise to read and pray, you've had it." I thank God for burning into my consciousness the futility of any shortcuts.

I learned the necessity of a close walk with God, maintaining a good conscience to God and man. If you were to ask my sister Joyce and my sister Lois what was it that persuaded them that I was truly converted, it wasn't that I was preaching on the street corner; it was that I was the first to come and ask forgiveness for family tension. Even when they were not disposed to own their sin, I was owning my own. I thank God for burning that lesson into my spiritual consciousness when I was barely out of the womb.

I thank God for teaching me the efficacy of earnest prayer. I've already told you what prayer meant in those days. And when my mother would see me come home from school and say, "Mom, I don't want supper tonight" and go to the little apartment downstairs in our home on 94 Soundview Avenue to pray and prepare to preach, she said, "If that boy whose got two hollow legs can skip a meal to pray and prepare to preach, Almighty God has done something in his heart." I learned the efficacy of earnest prayer.

I learned the power of the preached word, the reality of the Spirit's anointing in preaching. I can remember as an 18-year-old kid preaching in circumstances where the air seemed to be heavy with a sense of the presence of God. And when I was done preaching, no one moved. God taught me that the unction of the Holy Spirit is a blessed reality. So I have never been content to be a talking head and a mere Bible talker.

These are the lessons God burned into my spiritual hide. And I bless and thank God for every one of them, because those are the influences that have made me whatever I am by the grace of God that has been an instrument in your life over these 46 years.

Well, God willing, next week we'll pick up with what happen to get me here to North Jersey.

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