

THE OFFICE OF A BISHOP

UNDERSTANDING THE DESIRE



RICHARD E. TALBOT, SR.

THE OFFICE OF A BISHOP

Understanding the Desire

1 Timothy 3:1

**(Offering Humble Counsel and Insight and Sharing Personal
Experiences for Brethren Who May Feel This Desire)**

Richard E. Talbot, Sr.

**The Church of God, God's Acres
2020**

© 2020 by Richard E. Talbot, Sr.

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review or scholarly journal.

First Printing: 2020

ISBN 978-1-71696-704-7

This books and other books by this author can be ordered by contacting the author or:

The Church of God, God's Acres
675 N. Cedar Street
Newark, Ohio 43055
740-345-1312

www.GodsAcres.org

Printed by Lulu.com

DEDICATION

IN LOVING MEMORY

to Brother Herb and Sister Kathryn Dickerson
(Pastor of the Medina Church of God
from August 18, 1966, until his death on June 6, 2006)
For the powerful example and influence
they had on my life.

TO A DEAR BROTHER AND FRIEND

Brother Larry Dishman
(Evangelist of the Church of God)
Whose encouragement greatly helped inspire this writing.

TO MY DEAR WIFE

Who has been such a faithful companion and true friend
for more than 53 years.

FINALLY, TO MY CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN

That you should place all your hope in those things
of eternal value. Be established, rooted, and grounded in TRUTH.
Always stand for and support the glorious Church of God,
which is the only pillar and ground of the truth.
Lay hold upon eternal life!

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul Wrote to Timothy

"This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Timothy 3:1).

About This Book

For a number of years, God has been dealing with me to write some thoughts concerning brethren in assessing their desire to preach. I have had a real personal and mental struggle in doing so, due to feeling so inadequate. I have always felt there were many other fellow ministers much better fitted for this task. The burden has never left me, and so I began this writing on September 4, 2018. I am not an experienced writer, as you will soon notice, but I will do my best to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in expounding upon the Scriptures as I feel directed. My purpose is to help others understand their call, to understand that desire for the office of a bishop, and to not be ashamed of such a longing, for the Apostle Paul said, "He desireth a good work."

In my young adulthood, I perceived that most elder pastors and ministers seemed to frown upon the young ministers, as though it was wrong to feel a call to preach. In our own minds, we felt intimidated and unaccepted, that we were not old enough to have such a notion of preaching. I struggled, trying to decipher my desire and calling. God led me all the way, and I was blessed to have a couple of older ministers recognize my desire and call and encouraged me in it. One was the late Brother George Wills (former pastor of the North Point Church of God in Dundalk, Maryland) and the other was Brother Bill Wilson

(former pastor of the Possum Road Church of God in Springfield, Ohio). They were very special mentors to me, and they greatly assisted me from my early years of preaching and pastoring.

It is my sole desire with this writing to help others along the way in understanding the many things that are involved in accepting the call of God to preach His precious Word. It is written with a thankful and grateful heart, giving all praise and glory to God for any and all the good these few words may accomplish.

There may be those who will find fault with this book, and that is understandable. However, it is with much prayer and burden of heart that I offer this writing to you, in two parts:

- The first part is dealing with the word "*desire*," which includes "This Is a True Saying" (the call) and "The Man."
- The second part is a quick look at some of my personal experiences in accepting the call and in pastoring.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

*"This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."
(Psalm 118:23)*

Your brother in Christ,
Richard E. Talbot, Sr.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTERS	PAGES
1. This Is a True Saying	1
2. The Man	7
3. The Desire	11
4. My Experience	25
5. Hearing the Calling	31

CHAPTER 1

THIS IS A TRUE SAYING

"This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Timothy 3:1).

There ought to be an earnest desire in those who seek the office of a bishop. The focus of our desiring must be to bring glory to God and of doing the greatest good to the souls of mankind by this means. I would like to ask those who offer themselves to the ministry of the church this question: "Do you think you are moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office?" (*Matthew Henry Commentary*). When the Apostle Paul wrote, "*This is a true saying*," he was stating this fact: "This is a faithful, trustful, and sure saying!" He implied that there will be those who are taken with a strong desire to labor in the preaching of the Gospel and pastoring a congregation. The Lord, without a doubt, excites an earnest and irrepressible desire within the very heart and soul of a man to preach the Gospel.

The word *desire* means "to stretch oneself, reach out after, to long for." This desire can be so strong that one cannot be satisfied in any other calling. Paul emphasized that it is good to desire such a work as the ministry. Today I wonder, where are those young men so excited by the Holy Spirit that they wish to pursue this call? As Matthew Henry put it, "Do you think you are moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office?" The burden of my heart is to encourage brethren who feel a genuine desire for the office of a bishop (pastor). I wish to give them reason to cultivate that desire so it will come to fulfillment and to reassure their hearts and minds that there is nothing wrong with having a desire toward such a notable and good calling.

The call of God may come unexpectedly. My mind goes to when Samuel was sent to anoint David king over Israel. Psalm 78:70-72

says: "He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheep-folds: From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands."

Consider these four thoughts:

1. David was taken from his employment, his duty, and his present responsibility.
2. The timing was not very good. He had ewes that were heavy with young and needed his attention.
3. He was brought to a higher calling and duty than tending sheep, to that of feeding, tending, and caring for the children of Israel.
4. He fed them by the integrity of his heart (Jeremiah 3:15) and by the skillfulness of his hands (applying himself to the task).

Second Samuel 5:2 reads, "Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel." First, let us consider when aspiring to higher things, one must be faithful in the small and insignificant things (just as David was faithful to tend to his father's sheep). We should be willing workers in our local congregation. We read in Proverbs 27:18, "Who-so keepeth the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof: so he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured." The Proverb writer spoke of a single tree and the necessity of taking care of that *one tree*. If you were faithful, you could enjoy the fruit of your labors.

Many people are not satisfied with just one tree. If they cannot have *more*, they will not have *any*. I do not know why the small tasks that God asks of us are often ignored or followed through with little zeal, taking little pride in what we do. Every small task is necessary in the eyes of God. All labors are needed for the good of all the work of God. Remember, *David was anointed king*, but he returned and con-

tinued to be the faithful keeper of his father's sheep until he was called. He never allowed it to interfere with his task at hand until the divine providence of God sent him to take care of Goliath. We must first be faithful in the small things of life!

John Newton once said, "If two angels were to receive at the same moment a commission from God, one to go down and rule earth's grandest empire, the other to go and sweep the streets of its meanest [the poorest, dirtiest, and most run-down] village, it would be a matter of entire indifference to each which [position either was to fill] service fell to his lot, the post of ruler or the post of scavenger [a cleanup man]; for the joy of the angels lies only in obedience to God's will, and with equal joy they would lift a Lazarus [with his pus-oozing sores] in his [filthy] rags to Abraham's bosom, or be a chariot of fire to carry an Elijah home."

No task should ever be looked down on as though it is beneath your calling nor unfitting for your capabilities! If you prove faithful in taking care of this *one* tree, God may grant you an orchard to watch over. You should be a willing worker, doing whatever needs done, one that your pastor can count on for any task within your ability.

Being taught by my father's example, as well as that of my older brother, Daniel, I had from my early years cultivated a desire to work for the Lord. If possible, I was always available (along with others, young and old) for the church workdays, offering to do any task that needed to be done, such as lawn work, general cleanup, cleaning restrooms, painting, or whatever there was to do. I was glad to be a part of it. I found it important to take part in spiritual activities as well. I enjoyed attending Saturday night prayer meetings with my father when I was in my early teens. These were held in the basement of the Church of God at Essex, Maryland, and it was there that I first remember praying out loud in a public service. I truly thank the Lord for these precious memories!

Now, moving to another thought: consider the difference between a lay minister and a pastor, for there is a difference. A pastor is a position of leadership, while the position of a lay minister is a helper to the

pastor. (However, there is a wholesome recognition and influence that goes with being a lay minister.) What does the term "*lay*" mean when used with the word "*minister*"? The word *lay* refers to "one not trained in a certain profession," while the word *laity* refers to "the people distinguished from the clergy." A lay minister is one from the people whom God has called to the ministry but who is not yet officially a pastor. A lay minister is subject to his pastor, the same as others in the congregation.

Whatever we feel impressed to do, we must remember what Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 14:12, "Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church." The important thing to consider is that we should do *all* to the glory of God. Colossians 3:17 tells us, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." Criticism would not take such a toll on us if we had no desire for praise or recognition! That is why a person should not "seek" *great* things. Jeremiah 45:5 says, "And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not [things such as recognition, prestige, or being highly favored]." We must serve others only and seek always to have the favor of God, to please Him in all things. It does not take *great men* to do great things, only *consecrated men*!

A man whom God truly calls will feel the burden to be a servant to others. The call of God upon the soul to bear the Gospel message in the saving of souls does not, cannot, and has never successfully mixed with the heart of one who is worldly minded, an ambition seeker. Many feel the burden to preach, but few feel any call of pastoring a congregation. It is always proper and good for one to be a faithful lay minister, proving himself submissive to his pastor. It is generally accepted that one who has the blessing of his pastor and who has gained the confidence of those he has preached to is most ready to fill the position of a pastor over a congregation.

Perhaps one reason few feel the urgency to pursue a desire to be a pastor is due to the sacrifice it involves. Many lay ministers become comfortable with how God is using them. Generally, they have job

security. With the wife and children all settled in and happily satisfied, they have stability in their lives, and it would take some unusual means to uproot all this and accept a call to move to a new location. Yes, being a pastor or a full-time evangelist often requires many unseen sacrifices. God-called men usually pay a price to follow the Lord that many people know nothing about. This takes us to our next chapter, entitled "The Man."

CHAPTER 2

THE MAN

*"For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth,
to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart
is perfect toward him" (2 Chronicles 16:9).*

This wonderful verse of Scripture has been a source of inspiration to many of us down through our lives. It reassures that the Holy Spirit is always looking after us. If we look at the setting surrounding this verse, we find it was given as a manner of a rebuke to King Asa. In his early years, he relied upon the Lord God to lead him. In his later years, he trusted in the arm of flesh. (Read the surrounding verses in 2 Chronicles 16:7-14.) The rest of verse 9 reads, "Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars."

Look at the admonishment the Lord gave King Asa in his early years. Second Chronicles 15:1-2 states: "And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you." Further on in the next chapter, we see Asa turning to the arm of flesh. In verse 10 he "was wroth with the seer," so upset he ordered the prophet of God put "in a prison house." Three years later (verse 12), he became "diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great." Yet, even then, "he sought not to the LORD," and he died.

What does this say to us today? I believe the Lord would have us understand the importance of truly trusting Him in all circumstances of life. When we become separated from faith and belief in the Lord and His Word, the result will be a diseased foundation (as Asa's feet). It will spread throughout the whole being of our spiritual man, result-

ing in the death of the soul, even as it brought about Asa's physical death. With all this being said, let us go back to verse 9. We know that God is looking for a man, not just any man, but a very particular man, a concerned man, one who is thoroughly interested in the arduous task of leading souls to salvation. God is looking for a man who will feed and lead people into the green pastures of God's truth, see them established in the Lord, and see Satan defeated in the lives of men and women and young people. It is surely an awesome call that befalls the man with a good desire to be a pastor. He must be impartial toward all—the sickly and diseased, the wicked, the filthy, those who are respected by society, the rich, and the poor—for all need to be led into the way of salvation.

Jeremiah 5:1 says, "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it." The Lord is far more concerned about *quality* than *quantity*. Remember, one man with God is always a majority. Consider the words in Ezekiel 22:30, which says, "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none." The work of the Lord is very serious and full of responsibilities. A man is "sought" after, that he would "make up the hedge" and "stand in the gap" between righteousness and evil.

These acts require a *real* man, not a wishy-washy somebody who has no backbone or is just a crowd pleaser, but a *real* man, one who is so consecrated to God that the Holy Spirit could guide him in repairing breaches that Satan has brought about through worldly and evil influences. Also, this requires a man who, when faced with fiery trials, would not be fearful for his own life, or reputation, but would "stand in the gap" in defending the truth. This man may be placing his future, his job security, his finances, and his goals of life on the altar of sacrifice. Ezekiel wrote this regarding the soldiers who willingly forfeited their lives in battle. When they saw the enemy had made an opening in the wall, they would rush to that place and stand in the gap,

defending truth unto death!

The call to be a pastor is not for the faint or light-hearted. It is not for those who cannot remain focused on the task at hand. The church must pray as Jesus commanded. We read in Matthew 9:37-38: "Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." God is searching for men with a burden so pressing that they live with that burden, sleep with it, and carry it wherever they go. Nehemiah is a good example of this burden. If you read Nehemiah 1:1-4, you find that upon hearing the sad news of the holy city being so devastated, he broke down in tears. These were not temporary tears, but tears of a truly burdened heart. They did not just last a few minutes or an hour, but it affected Nehemiah for many days, causing him to mourn and fast, finally breaking out into an earnest prayer before the God of Heaven! Yes, upon hearing, his heart opened up, his mind and spirit became involved, and he offered himself freely to the Lord (Nehemiah 1:11).

This world is in real need. All around us we see the hopeless, the crushed, the defeated, and those who have lost their way. They need someone to shed some light, hope, and truth. Then there are those right among us, many who once worshiped with us, who through one situation or another have been mortally wounded, feelings have been crushed, and hurts have been caused. They have fallen by the wayside. My mind goes to the words of the song penned by Fanny J. Crosby, entitled "Rescue the Perishing." I refer to verse 3, which reads,

*Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness,
Chords that are broken will vibrate once more.*

Oh, the need is so great for God-fearing men to accept the call and go forth as the ambassadors of Christ, carrying "the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)! God is surely searching for men He can send forth. One's desire must be coupled with Godly characteristics. We call them "qualifications for the ministry."

In Exodus 18:17-22, when Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) gave Moses advice to choose men out of Israel to help judge the people, look at the qualities he advised Moses to ask for: (1) able men; (2) God-fearing men; (3) men of truth; and (4) men who hated covetousness. Another example is when the twelve disciples called the "multitude of the disciples" to them and expressed a need to choose men to lift the daily burden of helping the needs of the people. They were instructed to look for seven men who were: (1) men of honest report; (2) full of the Holy Ghost; and (3) full of wisdom (Acts 6:1-3).

May the Lord help us see and realize that we may be full of desire, but desire is not enough *by itself*. God is looking for men of quality who possess Godly characteristics, who are not self-centered, and who will put their lives on the line. Surely, these are prerequisites (defined as "something necessary to an end or to the carrying out of a function"). This is something you officially must have or do before you may have or do something else. God is not so hard up that He will call just anybody to the ministry. If He did so, He would place in jeopardy the man plus the congregation over which he would be pastoring.

He who would seek such a gift or calling as this must prove himself a worthy person. He would be consumed with a burning desire to be used of God. No man can be effective in the ministry who is not a man of prayer and who has not received a definite call from God. He must apply himself to the study of the Word of God, as Paul expressed to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15, writing, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." He must devote time to study and meditation upon the things of God. A man with these qualities will bring God's divine attention his way, and the Holy Spirit of God will notice his desire to be a preacher.

With these thoughts in mind, let us look at what Paul wrote to this young man, Timothy, concerning "The Desire."

CHAPTER 3

THE DESIRE

"This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Timothy 3:1).

In this chapter, I would like to consider Paul's statement, "If a man desire the office of a bishop, *he desireth a good work*." First, we need to recognize that the ministry should be looked on not as an honor or a special privilege but as "a work." It is of divine appointment, not of human invention. As "a work," it requires diligence and earnest application of one's self. One with a true divine calling will look more to his "work" than to any honor or advantage of his position. It is a good work, a work of the greatest importance, and a work designed for the greatest good. It is a labor for the life and happiness of immortal souls, to open men's eyes, and to turn them from the power of darkness to light, from the power of Satan to the power of God.

Seemingly, the way the Apostle Paul wrote this, he wanted Timothy to encourage those who expressed a desire to be used in the church as a minister. We, in the Church of God, understand that in the Word of God, the terms *bishop, elder, pastor, shepherd, and overseer* all have the same meaning. I will use the term *pastor* for this book, as it is better understood. Having a desire to be a pastor, Paul wrote, was to desire "a good work." In thinking about desires, I ask, "Where do desires come from?" Desires come from one's interest in life, that which captures his attention. For example, a young man who is captivated by engines and automobiles might become a mechanic. Another is taken up with health and medicine and so pursues the goal of becoming a doctor. Yet another enjoys working with wood and becomes a carpenter. These are all secular desires, and there is nothing wrong with any of them. They all offer a good living.

The desire to be a pastor, especially in the Church of God, is something that works altogether differently. For this desire does not exist because someone thinks in himself, "This is what I will do," but it develops out of a life fully surrendered to the Lord. Spiritual desires develop according to our commitment, consecration, and love for the things of God. They come to us as we involve ourselves more and more in the workings of the local congregation. Our spiritual environment creates a hunger in the soul for more and more of the things of God. A spiritual desire as strong as this—"to be a pastor"—is very unique indeed. It forms deep within the heart of an individual, often for a good while before it is known by others.

Take, for example, the experience my pastor had prior to being called to the congregation at Essex, Maryland. Brother Raymond Davis was a coal miner in Iaeger, West Virginia. He was also a lay minister in the congregation there, which was pastored by the late Brother G. W. Powell. Our congregations fellowshipped each other over many years. While at work in the mines, Brother Davis became so burdened for the work in Essex, Maryland, that while he was lying on his side, mining coal, he could hardly see for the tears in his eyes as the Lord dealt with him.

At that time, Essex had a good, well-respected pastor, the late Brother Harold Barber. Later, Brother Davis testified that he could not understand how he could feel a burden for a congregation that already had a good man of God over it. His pastor, Brother Powell, told him to just be patient and that God, in His time, would reveal all things to him. Some time later, Brother Barber resigned to enter the evangelistic field full-time. He did not know that God already had a man chosen to fill his place. What a sacrifice it was for Brother Davis to uproot his family and move to a place entirely different from where they were all raised. He had to quit his job, leave his home and all his familiar surroundings, and set out for a new life. He had no guarantee of how he or his family would be taken care of or supported. They packed up and moved because of the burden placed upon him from the Lord.

This call is not something we decide. The Church of God is unlike

other secular church organizations. With our headquarters in Heaven, we recognize Jesus Christ as the Head of the body, the church. He is the One who sets the members in the body as it pleases Him (1 Corinthians 12:18). Our pastors do not go to seminaries to learn to become a preacher or a pastor. This is a calling that cannot be taught by one man to another. This desire is one that comes from God Himself. It is His Holy Spirit that moves within an individual, stirring deep within his soul a desire to seek the ministry, a desire to be a pastor, a longing to be used in the labor and guidance of souls. This desire cannot be made up or thought up. It is not something that a man just decides to do. It must originate from the depths of a heart stirred by the Holy Spirit.

Before Isaiah began prophesying in Isaiah 6:1-7, he was mesmerized in a tremendous vision that transfixed his attention on things beyond his realm. He was captured by the thrill of God's presence, and in the midst of it, he said: "Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me" (verse 8). The call always follows faithful commitment and a complete yielding of self to the things of God. One must seek after and offer one's self for service, putting all upon the altar of sacrifice, and giving self to God in real time, even as Isaiah did when he cried out, "Here am I; Send me." Could you say, from the depths of your heart, "Here am I, Lord; send me"? Not crying out, "Use me, Lord," but crying out, "Send me, Lord"? To a lay minister, laboring in a local congregation somewhere, settled and secure, what would it take for God to disturb you to seek a greater desire? Could you truly pray, "Here am I, Lord, send me"?

Then, there may be pastors somewhere standing in the way of lay ministers leaving their congregation to go forth to begin works or pastor a congregation. This needs to be considered as well. They could be a hindrance to men feeling free to pursue the desire to be a pastor.

Dear one, if you think you have a desire, then put it to the test.

Consider the following:

1. If you can forget the desire by becoming more involved with the cares of life, then it is not a true desire.
2. If you can get along without its fulfillment, then it is not a true desire.
3. If you are satisfied with your job and finding fulfillment in raising a family and the desire to be a pastor just comes and goes, then it is not a true desire.

With a "true desire," you will not be able to lay it down, avoid it, or forget it, but it becomes a part of who you are, and what God wants you to become. Once again, I reference the following Scriptures:

Jeremiah 5:1 — "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it."

Ezekiel 22:30 — "And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none."

God is still looking for "a man . . . that seeketh truth," one who will "stand in the gap before me for . . . the land"! Much could be preached concerning these verses. Could you be the "man" whom God is searching for? Paul said to Timothy: "You need to encourage those who profess such a desire. Let them know they are desiring a good work. That it is right and good to truly desire such."

Consider the meaning of the word "*desire*." According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, this word means "to long for, seek after, to entreat or request." It also states that desire is "usually more eager than a wish." A wish may come and go, whereas a true desire will live with a person. It will become a major concern. He cannot get away from the ever pressing longing. The individual with a true desire will let go of earthly pursuits, worldly goals, and ambitions. He will not allow himself to become so entangled in the affairs of this life that he

is hindered in his ability to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He is always ready to go or ready to stay.

In 2 Timothy 2:1-5, the Apostle Paul let us know to fulfill this desire, one must be ready, and must "endure hardness." Then, Paul listed some important qualifications in verses 2-7 that must be met before one can be a recognized minister in God's church. Paul reminded us in 2 Timothy 2:5 that one must "strive . . . lawfully" if he expects to shoulder serious spiritual responsibilities that involve others. One should not expect to be eligibly recognized for the work of a pastor if his life fails the list of qualifications.

The qualifications for a pastor are rigid (1 Timothy 3:2-7):

1. "Blameless"—he must not be under suspicion of any scandal. He must give as little occasion for blame as possible for this would reflect reproach upon his office.
2. "The husband of one wife"—not having many wives at once, as this was a common practice, especially among the Gentiles.
3. "Vigilant" and watchful—he must watch over himself and the souls of those who are committed to his charge, because Satan, as our "adversary," goes about "as a roaring lion . . . seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).
4. "Sober," temperate, and moderate—in his lifestyle, his home, material goods, and all creature comforts. Sobriety and watchfulness are often found together in the Scriptures because they are so closely related.
5. "Of good behavior"—composed and solid in emotions and feelings. He must not be careless or haphazard, slothful or vain.
6. "Given to hospitality"—a true lover of the brethren, one who looks with favor upon strangers, and one who will share his blessings with others in need, offering an outstretched hand to those less fortunate.

7. "Apt to teach"—one who is both able and willing to communicate to others the knowledge that God has given him, one who is fit to teach and ready to take all opportunities of giving instructions, who is himself well-instructed in the things of the Kingdom of Heaven.
8. "Not given to wine"—not a drunkard, lest he should be guilty of perverting the Word of God.
9. "No striker"—not one given to arguing. He must be one who is not quarrelsome, nor apt to be violent, doing all things with kindness, love, and gentleness. The servant of the Lord must not strive.
10. "Not greedy of filthy lucre"—not using his ministry to enrich himself at the cost of those whose souls he is entrusted with. He must live above and beyond any suspicion of such.
11. "Patient, not a brawler"—of a mild disposition, not given to anger, or excessive temper. He must be one who guards his words and sets a watch about his tongue. He can neither strike with his hands nor be a brawler with his tongue.
12. "Not covetous"—covetousness is the worst in a minister of the Gospel. His calling places him in a position of having to converse so much with another world.
13. "One that ruleth well his own house"—the families of ministers ought to be examples of good to all other families. It is the duty of their children to submit "with all gravity" to the instructions given them.
14. "Not a novice"—he must not be a novice. He must not be new to the Gospel. His understanding must go far beneath the surface of the Scriptures. His newness causes him to be more subject to pride, of being exalted in his mind.
15. "Have a good report of them which are without"—he must have a good reputation with his neighbors and be under no reproach of scandal.

A principle that has long been held to within the churches of God is that a man should prove himself teachable and submit himself under a man of God, proving himself worthy to be a leader of others.

Let us look again at the thought of desire. Certainly, desire alone is not enough to open a position of a pastor in the Church of God. Desire must be coupled with the qualifications and abilities to faithfully fulfill the responsibilities of working with precious souls. This is not a task to be taken lightly or with the easy "go at it" attitude. "He desireth a good *work*." *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* says that the word *work* means "activity in which one exerts strength or faculties to do or perform something; a sustained physical or mental effort to overcome obstacles and achieve an objective or result. A specific task, duty, function, or assignment." This is certainly a good description of "work" concerning the position of a pastor!

To understand where the idea of pastor originated, we must look back to Moses and his prayer to God in Numbers 27:15-20, which reads: "And Moses spake unto the LORD, saying, Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd. And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; And set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient."

Since this time, some of the many duties of a God-called pastor have been to teach his flock how to live in obedience to the Word of God, how the Word can be applied to every situation in life, to preach in the pulpit, and to preach by his own everyday life the precepts of holiness and righteousness. He is to show how the Word of God can be lived in "real time" in a practical and sensible manner.

We are to "remember them which have the rule over you, who

have spoken unto you the word of God" (Hebrews 13:7), It is their faith we are to follow, paying close attention to their lives, using for a pattern their absolute faith, trust, and confidence in God and how they are living and practicing what they are preaching. Let all that be an encouragement to you that you may do well in your soul.

No one should ever think being called of God to pastor a congregation of people is an easy task. Never should this sacred calling be entered lightly or without the definite knowledge that God has called you! This is a good work, a rewarding work, but it is a hard, taxing, and difficult work! It is a work that should never be attempted by the fainthearted or weak or those who lack confidence in themselves.

Preaching is only one part of being a pastor. (A brother pastor once informed me that "one may be a good pastor, while at the same time, a poor preacher.") Especially important are the duties of a pastor outside of the pulpit in counseling, working with broken hearts and damaged relationships. These are among some many tough situations that you can only experience with time in the ministry. Among these duties, outside of the pulpit, you will show how the preached Word needs to be applied to lives and in homes. You need to help those whom you pastor live the message. You will be endlessly counseling, encouraging, and explaining to precious souls the will of God for them, their families, and their marriages.

Ezekiel 3:17 states, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me." Jeremiah 6:17 says: "Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken." A man who desires this good work must also realize that his life will no longer be of a private nature! It is like living in a glass house.

Consider the following:

- Everyone will be looking at you.
- People will be watching your every move.

- Everyone will be looking at:
 - How you show love, compassion, discipline, and firmness in the training of your children.
 - How you love, show compassion, and care for your wife.
 - What kind of worker you are.
 - How you handle your finances.
 - If you do things secretly or under a false pretense.
 - How you respond to criticism and negative remarks.
- You must be an example of moral correctness, holiness, and purity.

There are so many more concerns that could be listed. If you think you are being called to be a pastor, ask yourself, "Are you ready for this kind of life?" You will subject not only yourself, but your wife and children as well to live in this house of glass. A congregation must have the utmost confidence in your life, and they gain this by listening to and watching your daily life. The flock is instructed to follow *your* faith and consider the pattern of *your* daily life. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." If we want them to obey this verse, we must live our lives so that those whom we pastor have no justifiable reason to disobey this instruction. As Isaiah 62:6 says, a man called of God is set as a "watchman" over the flock. It is his duty to faithfully sound the trumpet:

1. To warn of any danger, evil, or compromise.
2. To warn of worldliness that often attempts to come in among the people.
3. To warn of false ministers who may attempt to influence them.
4. To warn of laxity and lukewarmness, which are great dangers of this seventh-seal age, the closing age we are living in.

5. To warn against rebellion, stubbornness, becoming stiff-necked, and spiritually hard of hearing.
6. To warn of dangers affecting their marriages, their love in the home and the congregation.
7. To warn of a self-deception (those who hear but never do).

The Prophet Isaiah spoke in Isaiah 21:6 of the need to "set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth." The position of the watchman is "in the watchtower" (verse 5), and that tower is generally set upon the wall. The watchman must have a keen (spiritual) eyesight. Also, he must be filled with the Holy Spirit of God so he can discern the many dangers unseen to the natural eye. A watchman must warn of danger *before* the congregation becomes aware of it. He must so prepare them to protect their souls, being faithful to sound the trumpet so that the people might give heed and obey by preparing themselves accordingly.

You can read the solemn warning to the watchman in Ezekiel 33:1-19. Many people will heed the warnings and appreciate them, while others will resist to their own destruction. To say this is a great responsibility is understating the truth. **THERE CAN BE NO MEASUREMENT OF THE GRAVE DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES THAT A TRUE WATCHMAN HAS LAID UPON HIM.** If he sees danger and fails to warn, or if the enemy approaches and is never detected due to carelessness on his part, souls will be lost. "The blood" of these precious people will God require "at the watchman's hand" (Ezekiel 33:6).

The pastor must take heed to his own preaching and see that his wife and children all heed the same message that is given to the congregation. Acts 20:28 says, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." As a pastor, you accept a grave responsibility. Service after service you will minister to souls who are headed for long eternity. As Paul stated in the above Scripture verse, you must first "take heed" to yourself. You need to pray, study constantly, and take care

of your wife and children (materially and giving to them love and affection). Sometimes a pastor can become so involved with the giving of himself to the congregation that he neglects to care for the needs of his own family. This eventually brings a reproach upon the work of God. The family needs the father's and husband's attention *first* and *foremost* before the congregation.

A pastor must keep himself dedicated as a clean vessel unto the Lord. He must be an example to the flock. **ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT A PREPARED MESSENGER IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN A PREPARED MESSAGE!** A pastor must also be aware of three common snares that Satan uses most often to tempt and bring about the downfall of a man of God. As a young minister, I was instructed to strongly guard against these three snares that have helped bring about the downfall of many a man of God:

1. Women
2. Finances
3. Position (prestige and power)

In today's world there might be a fourth one, that being the Internet. To pastor or preach to others, the Word of God requires that the vessel be clean, pure, and holy. The man becomes a conduit through which the Holy Spirit flows, and He cannot flow through a contaminated vessel; otherwise, all would be unprofitable.

Titus 1:7 states, "For a bishop must be blameless" Young man, set some guidelines for yourself in all of your life, and especially for the ministry. Keep yourself above suspicion by keeping your distance from any appearance of evil or compromising position. (Note: a man's worth to God in public is what that man is in private.) In counseling with women, try to always include your wife or at the least a sister well established in the truth and respected in the congregation. Remember that your wife has feelings of her own. Please do not forget her. She also has an enemy hard at work in her mind, filling it with all kinds of thoughts of her own. Always be open with her and try to un-

derstand her feelings. Once a man, who has been used in the ministry, falls under sinful behavior or conduct, it may take years for him to regain (if he can at all) that which was lost because of his indiscretion. "Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Ephesians 5:15).

A God-called pastor will care for the souls of his flock, even as Christ would, as the Apostle Paul stated in 1 Peter 5:2-3: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind: Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock."

The call to the ministry is truly a "call," even though it is also a work. However, a true pastor will never view his duties as "work." Without the sense of a calling, it will become just work! Then, the joy is gone, and the burden for souls is no longer the motivating force behind the preaching. Sometimes a person can become what the world calls "burnt out." If this occurs, he needs a place of true repentance and a revival of the soul. Only the individual himself can feel and *know* the call of God, not his wife, his parents, his friends, not even his pastor. Others may mention that they feel this way or that way about you, but that is as far as they can go. **ONLY YOU CAN KNOW THE CALL.** Your pastor will come to sense God's hand (call) upon you as well as other established saints, but the ultimate "call" must be heard, or felt, by the one being called.

Here again are some qualifications to be obeyed. The man of God whom Peter mentioned in 1 Peter 5:1-3:

1. Must feed the flock.
2. Must willingly take the oversight thereof.
3. Must not do so for financial gain.
4. Must not be "lords" over the flock.
5. Must be an example to the flock.

Proverbs 27:23 tells us, "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy

flocks, and look well to thy herds." (We find yet an additional list of qualifications in Titus 1:6-9.)

The pastor must give himself freely to the care of the sheep. He must take time to meditate upon them and spend much time in prayer concerning his sheep. If a pastor is required to work at some secular employment to care financially for the family, he must give of himself to the constant demanding care of the flock. A pastor must also uphold an outward standard of holiness for his congregation concerning the standards of modesty in dress and conduct and explain that Bible modesty is not regulated by sports, temperature, or other activities. God's standards are the same in worship as they are in daily living. Even though the Biblical teachings of modesty are very outdated according to today's society, they are still the truth of God's Holy Word, the Bible!

Pastors in this modern day and age need the grace of God to enable them to stand against the political moves of our government. Laws are being passed allowing certain deeds—once considered wrong and sinful—to be considered right and acceptable in accordance to the legal laws of the land, but that is not so according to God's divine law! There is no political correctness in the preaching of God's Word! Truth must *never* be sugar-coated to appease the audience. We must remind our congregations concerning what is watched and what goes on when one is on the Internet. Often, a pastor becomes accused of meddling. That accusation only comes because someone's feelings were hurt.

The man of God must take full responsibility for success or failure. If he succeeds, and the congregation is doing well, everyone joins in for the credit, but if the work begins to struggle and things are not going so well, he takes the blunt of the criticism. The pastor must always keep a right spirit in *every* situation and circumstance! Others may not, but he must! He must be strong enough to bear his children's hurt feelings resulting from unjust criticism by some in the congregation. There will be times when his wife is hurt and deeply offended, but he *cannot* rush to her defense. He must remain calm and right within himself and before God.

A pastor must be a wise negotiator and a tactful adviser. He will be called upon to listen to disputes and settle serious disagreements between members of the flock. Yes, it is hard and many times a thankless task, but oh, the rewards are rich beyond compare! To know that you have helped some soul defeat Satan's attempt to shipwreck their soul, to know that you have helped to save a young couple's marriage from falling apart, to see those under your care grow into spiritually mature men and women faithfully serving the Lord are joys beyond compare!

The preaching challenges people's hearts to go deeper into the will, purpose, and meaning of God and His abiding presence in their life day by day. "How shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14). "How shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Romans 10:15).

Look at some benefits of preaching:

1. Preaching inspires the soul to seek after and long for a greater fulfillment of God in the individual life.
2. Preaching gives an incentive to climb to higher heights in our spiritual life.
3. Preaching causes the soul to examine himself or herself of past conduct and behavior.
4. Preaching puts sin in its proper perspective, making sin exceedingly sinful so that the soul of man comes to hate the sin, giving him cause to seek forgiveness and to repent, being born again, made a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Preaching and pastoring will go hand in hand! Yes, if you desire to be a lay minister or pastor, you desire a good work, but you must have a genuine calling!

CHAPTER 4

MY EXPERIENCE

I wish to draw upon my experience of how I felt the call of God upon my soul, heart, and mind. Let me say here at the beginning, without the power of the Holy Spirit, I am nothing. I feel very insignificant and have hesitated for a long time to even try to write a book such as this. Who am I that I should presume to instruct others in the way of the ministry or other works of God? As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am."

If I can share some of my experience and if it helps someone along the way, then I will be grateful and give all glory and honor to the Lord God who only is worthy of all praise. Let me begin. In my younger years, I cannot remember my pastor or any minister in the Church of God ever read 1 Timothy 3:1 and expound on the thought of encouraging young men to desire to be a minister! That subject was never publicly encouraged. In my day, the older generation of pastors frowned on young men feeling called to preach (the belief was that young men always needed to sit and learn), let alone have the feeling of being called to pastor. We heard many messages concerning consecration and dedication, even to the opening up of ourselves to the mission field. Yet, I do not remember ever being encouraged to cultivate a desire to be a pastor or evangelist. The silence on this caused me some consternation about my own developing desire to be used by God in the ministry.

From my teenage years, I have always had a real longing and desire to work with people in a spiritual setting and to be a laborer in the Kingdom of God. I read and heard many of our older ministers testify of how they *ran* from the call of God. Some only answered God's call to preach from a sick bed, after they had avoided the call for many months. By the time I strongly felt the burden to mention something

about my call, both my father and older brother had already answered their call to preach. Oh, how the enemy worked on me! He made me feel I just wanted to be like them! I had a real struggle with those thoughts, but finally I asked the Lord to help me put those thoughts behind me, and I answered the call of God for myself.

When I finally mentioned the call to my dad, he immediately cautioned me to be sure, to *make sure*, that this was not some impulsive move or fleeting feeling. I already knew better than that. I had felt God's hand on me since around my sixteenth year. I found out later that my dad had felt the hand of God on me all along, but he never let it be known. That was surely good wisdom on his part, for he knew I must answer this call on my own. I was always told that if someone can *talk you into* doing something, someone else can *talk you out of* it. If one knows, without a doubt, that it was God who called and he is fully settled on that, neither Satan nor anyone else will convince him otherwise! A desire then must be cultivated. If what you are feeling is a true desire, you will work with it and do all you can to help it increase in intensity. A *wish* can easily be laid aside to follow some other pursuit, but you cannot let go of a true conscious *desire*.

After I had been pastoring for several years, I asked my former pastor, Brother Davis, "Why did you seem to always discourage me from entering the ministry?" He replied, "Brother Richard, if I could have discouraged you, then you would have known God was not in it!" Another brother told me once, "If I could have forgotten about what I felt was 'a call of God upon me,' then it would not have been of God." He told me to wait for a few months and then see how I felt. At the end of that time, the desire was stronger than ever.

A Sunday school teacher in the Essex congregation, Brother Alvin (Chick) Wilson (who later became pastor of the Church of God in Morgantown, West Virginia), worked with the young people. He was the first one who asked me to "talk" in young people's meeting at the Church of God in Essex, Maryland. I was twelve years of age at the time. I studied for many days and wrote many pages of notes. I thought: "Whoa! This will take much too long for the half hour that I

will have!" Well, I finished all those pages in less than twelve minutes! I was sweating and wore out with the stress of that experience! After that, I spoke in various youth meetings at home and other congregations and the camp meetings at Manassas, Virginia, and God's Acres in Newark, Ohio.

The late Brother George Wills (pastor of the Church of God at North Point, Maryland for many years) always told me that when God opens up a door for you, He intends for you to go through it. By the grace of God, I have followed his advice. I asked no one anywhere to let me preach. Brother Wills told me: "Your gift will make room for itself! You don't have to blow your own horn to get doors to open for you. God will see to that." We were taught *not* to go around and ask to preach but to wait for God to lay it upon some pastor's heart to ask us to preach.

I was born into a very spiritual family on June 13, 1947, at the home of my parents in Essex, Maryland. We lived next door to the church parsonage, which was next to the building of the Church of God. We never had far to go to get to the house of worship. The late Brother Harold Barber was my pastor for the first sixteen years of my life. He definitely was a true man of God, and he laid a solid foundation of truth upon which my life was to be built. He was a man I highly admired and respected. To this day, I thank the Lord for the years I sat under his ministry!

Our home was a very conservative one because of the tight grip our parents kept on all their children. I was the third of five siblings. I had one sister and three brothers. We were all brought up in the same manner, adhering to the Biblical teachings of the Church of God. We were taught of sin and Satan, of evil and wickedness, and of the need for repentance and salvation. We were taught the importance of "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). This was a powerful message to all the young people. We heard it at every revival (home and elsewhere) and at all the camp meetings we attended. It was strongly stressed as a great need to give oneself to God for missionary service

and to minister in helps in the local congregation.

Many of us, as young people, were at the altar numerous times in those years, in all earnestness, desiring to present our bodies to the Lord. We had been taught that it was far more important than any other move we could make: more important than a college degree, finding a good paying job, and finding a companion. It was always stressed to "put God first in your life." Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." This I fully attempted to do.

I truly found a genuine experience of salvation while living in Denver, Colorado, I was about fifteen and a half years of age. It was this experience of truly being born again that quickened me and made me alive to Christ my Savior. My first trip to an altar was at the age of five, in the Essex Church of God. For the next decade, I truly struggled with getting settled. Thank God, the day finally came in which I knew, for the first time, I was a changed, born-again person! I still feel the effects of that experience to this day. Since then, I have worked, by the grace of God, to enrich my life with God. I have endeavored to keep my consecration to God in an up-to-date condition!

In June 1963, Dad moved us back to Essex, Maryland, and once again we could worship in a good, solid Church of God congregation. The Church of God at Essex was about to undergo a great change in leadership. Brother Harold Barber had entered the evangelist field, and God called a younger man by the name of Brother Raymond Davis out of the coal mines of southern West Virginia. God installed him as our pastor in May 1964, in a beautiful, Spirit-filled Sunday morning service.

This pastor was an inspiration to all the young people to continue living dedicated lives for the Lord. He upheld the truth of God's Eternal Word and the holiness of standard. He was to be a big help to my life and ministry. I was around sixteen or seventeen years of age when the change of pastors took place. It was at this time, I began speaking in young people's meetings more regularly, and I began to definitely feel the hand of God resting upon me. We had a neighboring congre-

gation at North Point, Maryland, where the late Brother George Wills was pastor. It was Brother Wills who first seemed to recognize the Lord's hand upon my life for the ministry, and I preached my first message in his pulpit, being about eighteen years of age and in my senior year of high school. Brother Wills became my spiritual mentor. He wielded great influence over my life, and I am very thankful for those years we spent working together.

During this same time, my dad felt the burden to pastor a small congregation at Morgantown, West Virginia. It was the same year that I graduated from Kenwood Senior High School in Essex, Maryland, in June 1965. In July 1965, we all moved to West Virginia, to our new home and to new experiences.

CHAPTER 5

HEARING THE CALLING

"And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" (Hebrews 5:4).

Numbers, Chapter 17, is dedicated to Aaron's rod that budded. What a beautiful and unusual experience this must have been, without a doubt, signifying that when God calls, there is no disputing the fact. It was obvious that Aaron was the man of God's choice. So it should be with men today who are called of God. The pastor should be able to feel and discern the hand of God upon one of his flock. The pillars of the church should recognize the hand of God upon one of their own being so-called. No man should take this honor unto himself! Down through the years, there have been those who attempted to assume a call to the ministry, but never had the anointing. Their attempt only caused confusion and discouragement, and they soon faded by the wayside. You will not just wake up out of a deep sleep some morning and suddenly feel God has called you to the ministry.

Most everyone feels the call differently. There is not just one way or one method for someone to tell you just how you will feel or how it will come about. You will *know!* That is the only way I can describe it. The call of God that I received evolved over time. When I began feeling the burden and desire to work for God, I did not understand pastoring. I never sought that; I just kept myself before the Lord for *any field of labor* He chose. I was fully consecrated in my mind (at least I thought I was) to go to the mission field. If that was where God would lead, I would go.

This desire became the first of ten questions I put before my wife (as a kind of fleece) before I asked her to be my wife. I prayed much and placed this before the Lord. I prayed that if she was truly the one

for me to marry, she would answer "yes" to each of my questions immediately and without hesitation. I did not explain my prayer to her in advance, for that would have spoiled the trueness of the test. Needless to say, I was anxious about how she would respond.

I put my very first question this way: "Honey, I feel the Lord has His hand upon me to work for Him. He may lead me to Africa, and we may have to live in a mud hut. Would you still be my wife?" Immediately, she said, "Yes!" My heart cried out, "Wow!" The next question I asked was: "Honey, I don't ever plan on making a lot of money. I may never be able to provide you with a nice brick home. Will you still marry me?" Again, without one second of hesitation, she replied, "Yes!" And so it went with the following eight questions. It was then I asked her if she would be my wife. Tears of joy and amazement were pouring from our eyes, because I asked the big question, according to her fleece, that she had placed before the Lord! I had no idea that she also had prayed a kind of fleece question as well, that being that when I proposed to her, I would use the words, "Will you be my wife?" and not, "Will you marry me?" So, we both passed each other's test!

Oh, how marvelous the workings of God! That was in October 1966, and we were married on June 17, 1967. I was twenty years of age, and she was twenty-two. An embarrassing incident: Being under the age of twenty-one, I was too young to sign any legal documents. My mother had to sign for me so I could get married. Then, when we moved back to Maryland, my new wife had to sign for me, as my legal guardian, so I could get my Maryland driver's license. Now that was embarrassing! I share that to let the reader know how serious marriage was to both of us. We desired to be in God's divine will! I did not know when, where, what, or how my place in the Kingdom of God would be, but I was just waiting in prayer for God's divine direction.

My father performed the wedding ceremony for us, and my wife and I were married in the original church building in Hilderbrand, West Virginia, just outside of Morgantown, West Virginia. We then settled in Essex, Maryland, and we submitted ourselves to Brother Raymond Davis as our pastor. He knew of the feeling I felt concerning God hav-

ing His hand upon my life, and this is how he advised me: "Brother Richard, prepare yourself in study and prayer. Stay out of debt. Don't get entangled with things in this world. Keep yourself free, so that when God calls you, you will be free to go." I deeply appreciated his counsel, and today I pass it on to others as excellent advice to follow.

It was in the fall of 1969 that I felt a burden to help a small congregation in Churchville, Maryland. It was about twenty-five miles from Essex, Maryland, and there were about twelve worshippers there. Most of them were very elderly. I was ordained in the Church of God at Essex, Maryland on December 28, 1969, along with my older brother, Daniel, by Brother Raymond Davis (my pastor), Brother Verd Lightfoot (evangelist), Brother Kenneth Hawk (lay minister at the Essex Church of God), and my dad, Brother Preston Talbot (pastor in Morgantown, West Virginia). As of this writing, it has been fifty years since the day of my ordination.

Our first daughter, Michele, was born in May 1969, and our son, Richard Jr., was born in April 1971. Along with my wife, I was accepted as pastor by the congregation in Churchville, Maryland, in January 1970. We were young and had a lot to learn. There were so many things we did not know or understand correctly. Some of the following are embarrassing to disclose, but I do so to help others understand that just because something feels right to do and you do it with all good intentions of heart and soul, it does not mean God is in the leading of it. In my zeal for God, I outran wisdom and common sense, which resulted in much financial trouble and a load of unnecessary stress. Let me take time here to pass on to the reader the difficulties I brought upon myself.

I had a decent job at the General Motors plant in Baltimore, Maryland. I was making three dollars and thirty-five cents an hour plus good benefits. This was good pay back then. I had worked there about a year when we moved to Churchville. After being there for a while, I got the notion I needed a job closer to Churchville, so I could be more involved with the congregation and community. Now, there were several men who lived in that area and traveled to General Motors

every day to work. I could have ridden with them in a car pool, but *I* felt *I* needed to get something closer to my home and a new community. In my mind and heart's desire, I was doing this for the glory of God. I was seeking Him first, to the best of my knowledge and understanding.

The only job I could get was selling insurance for "People's Life." I struggled to make a living at this, but I failed. I ended up in a financial bind that really hurt us. I could not understand why things were no better. After all, I was doing this for the Lord and His work. I learned I could have been much more effective had I stayed with General Motors and drove back and forth. Hindsight is a good teacher!

It was about this time that one of our sisters needed a ride to church. I saw a used red-and-white Volkswagen van for sale. I thought, "This is what I need to help get people to church." Well, the payments financially strapped us. On our way to the Newark, Ohio, camp meeting with a van full of passengers, the engine blew. What a mess! Again, the enemy of my soul wasted no time attacking me with the thoughts of: "Where is your God now? You went into debt to get this van for the Lord's work and now look at you." I had to battle those thoughts, and by the Lord's help, I conquered them, but not without the stress of it all.

A dear old saint of God, Brother Wilkins, took it upon himself to replace my motor, and the camp meeting crowd took up a love offering for us that paid for the motor. Brother Wilkins would take nothing for his labor, even though he missed several days of the camp meeting, helping us out. I will never forget this kind brother who always had a good word to say. He quoted many poems. The one I remember most is "The Bridge Builder."

Too often we may do some things on the spur of the moment, without really weighing all the pros and cons or being sure it is of God's divine direction. We may *think* it is God's will. We pastored at Churchville about a year and a half, and then, feeling the need to resign the work, we worshiped once again with the Essex congregation. By this time, I had gotten a job in a shipyard in Port Deposit, Maryland,

near to Churchville where we yet lived. It was here I finally learned the trade of welding! I was trained at the shipyard, and upon graduating the class, I became a welder making more money than I had ever made, a little over seven dollars per hour plus benefits. We could finally get our finances under control and enjoy a bit of freedom from the stress of debts.

If I had used some of my God-given common sense, I could have spared my family much trouble. I brought stress upon my wife and my young family. Whatever we go through, good or bad, it affects our families, perhaps much more than we as the father or husband. My wife was very thoughtful and faithful with her love and understanding. My mind goes to the Scripture found in Romans 10:2, "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." Oh, the lessons I learned! I trust these personal experiences will help someone to be careful to avoid similar, dangerous pitfalls.

The Apostle Paul, in writing the letters to Timothy and Titus, used the phrase "This is a faithful saying" (1 Timothy 1:15; 1 Timothy 4:9; Titus 3:8). These statements were written to give credence to what was being said. Then, our Scripture text, 1 Timothy 3:1, says, "This is a true saying [or let there be no doubt], if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work."

My job in the shipyard was ideal. We lived right across the road from where I worked. I could walk to work and come home for lunch. I truly enjoyed welding, and I was still learning the trade. I was at peace. God was blessing us, and we were happy. Then one evening, my father called to tell me about meeting some new people at the God's Acres camp meeting in Newark, Ohio. They were from a Church of God congregation in a place called Ovapa, West Virginia. They had been a part of the Anderson Church of God movement, but they had severed ties. Their Anderson pastor had left them, and they were looking for preachers to fill the pulpit for them while waiting on the Lord for someone to feel the burden to be their pastor. If I was interested, I was to call a Brother Gay O'Dell and talk to him. After praying and seeking God's will in the matter and feeling free in my

spirit to call him, I did, not knowing that this call would change the rest of my life!

Although Brother O'Dell did not know me (only through my dad), he seemed glad I called, and we set a date for the Labor Day weekend in September 1972. Brother O'Dell and I agreed that I would come on Saturday, be prepared to preach both services on Sunday, and then return home on Monday. I was filled with a lot of excitement and anticipation, not knowing what to expect. Having lived in rural West Virginia for several years, I had in my mind some real country people with a church building set upon cinder blocks on the side of a hill, kind of run down, with outhouses in the back. Wow! I was in for a surprise!

From Essex, Maryland, the road to Ovapa was a long one (about a nine-hour drive). There were no interstates connecting the two places. They were working on Interstate 79 at the time. Much of our trip was on two-lane state roads. We had to stop and ask directions several times, but we finally reached Ovapa. We drove up the hill to where they said the church was located. There we saw an extremely well-kept white church building with no outhouses in the back. What an impression that made on us!

Pulling into the parking lot, we saw sitting out at the far end of a field, a beautiful ranch style home of brick, with a bright yellow, late model car. Wow! This was not what I expected! I was driving a 1967 Plymouth Fury. It burned more oil than gas, or so it seemed. The rear bumper was securely attached with a coat hanger wire. We pulled into the drive, and out came a tall, distinguished-looking man with a glowing face. I never will forget that first impression Brother O'Dell made on me.

I will digress here to relate a couple of the many incidences concerning this fine brother. I found out later what a mighty man of God he was. Others said that he possessed a spirit of prayer. He had a place out in the woods behind his house from which his strong praying voice echoed across the hillsides and valleys, especially early in the morning. I would stand still in reverence, being captured by the presence of God's Holy Spirit. During the church service, when he prayed, you

would feel as though the windows of Heaven had opened and God was pouring His Spirit out upon the saints. He was also one who enjoyed praising His Lord. At times, he would jump straight up and give out a shout. One time in jumping on the edge of the platform, his glasses jumped out of his shirt pocket, and when he jumped again, he came right down on top of them, smashing them to pieces.

There was a time when our daughter, Michele, was very sick. My wife and I had prayed and prayed for her, but she found no relief. Finally, about three o'clock in the morning, she said, "I want Poppy to come out and pray for me." (Poppy was the familiar name for Brother O'Dell.) I said, "I really would hate to wake him up at this time of the morning." She said, "I need him now!" I called, and he came right out and had prayer for her. Immediately her pain began to subside. By morning, she was fine! Poppy O'Dell was a Godly man whom we dearly loved. I was very impressed with his deportment.

Back to our first impressions. We met with dear Sister O'Dell, who was the perfect wife and hostess, ready to meet our every need. They fed us, and we talked and were informed that there was a regularly scheduled young people's meeting that Saturday night. So, we got ourselves ready and went to the church building. What a nice-looking group of people we met. When we were all settled and just before service was to begin, Brother O'Dell came back to me and asked me about preaching that night. I was shocked! I said, "I wasn't expecting to preach until tomorrow morning." He replied, "Well, these folks want to hear you tonight." I nervously agreed.

I preached with all I had, giving it what I thought was my very best! After the service, one brother came up to me and said, "Brother, that was good, but I guess you'll get fired up in the morning." Wow! I told my wife before we went to bed, "He doesn't realize it, but I have already fired all I had!" What an experience that weekend was. They fed us the best meals, and everyone had new vehicles and nice homes.

On the way home, I told my wife: "This place is not for us; we don't fit in with them. Their lifestyle is well above ours." All the new acquaintances terrified and intimidated my dear wife. (She has always

had a hard time meeting new people, but God has surely helped her.) We left for home on Monday and thought, "Well, that's that!" They had been calling brethren to preach for them who were highly esteemed in the church, brethren whom I looked up to. I never considered that I would be used there again. However, as December approached, I became burdened once again for Ovapa. A real desire began to build in my heart to call Brother O'Dell and see if they might want me to come back down over New Year's weekend. I called my dad to talk about my feelings and burden, asking him what I should do. He refused to answer me, telling me I needed to make up my mind by seeking the Lord in earnest prayer. He would make no suggestions or give me any advice. This was entirely up to me!

I called Brother O'Dell, and he said he would let me know. Brother O'Dell called back to say that a lot of the people were going to the winter camp meeting in Newark, Ohio, but would be back that Sunday, December 31, 1972. They wanted to know if I could come in for that Sunday. So, changing our plans to be at the camp meeting, I agreed to do that. My wife and I and our two children climbed into that good ole Plymouth Fury once again and made the drive back to Ovapa.

I preached the Sunday morning service, and that afternoon such a feeling came over me—a burden, a heavy earnestness—and the strongest impressions upon my heart and mind that God was calling me to pastor these dear people. That evening after service, I asked to speak to the trustees, and we went into a back Sunday school room. It was there that I laid my burden out before them. They all looked shocked! Then, I was shocked to see them shocked! It was not the reaction I had expected. They said they would pray about it and see how God led.

There was a kind of impromptu scheduling of a fellowship meeting on Monday, New Year's Day, 1973. My mom and dad came down from Morgantown, and Sister King came over with some of her congregation from Gilboa, West Virginia. We had a wonderful service with a great moving of the Spirit of God. Several in the congregation stood and testified how God had shown them I was to be their pastor.

The congregation consisted of thirty-two souls, seventeen adults and fifteen children. That was a beautiful service! I had never been in one just like that! God so wonderfully confirmed what He had shown me the day before. I accepted them, and they accepted me as their pastor. I would go home and make preparations for the move to West Virginia. My spirit was high and excited, but my dear wife's spirit was that of suspense and wonderment. She was filled with questions that I truly had no answers for, other than, "God will work it all out."

At that point in time, we were just getting back on our feet and enjoying some easement of financial needs. I had a good paying job. We were worshipping in a good, solid congregation where we had plenty of friends and rich fellowship. Now we would go off into an entirely new life, with people whom we did not know, at the young age of twenty-four, and accept this position with an established congregation, with no promise of a job, no assurance of income, and no home to move to. What were we going to do? Psalm 32:8 came to my mind, which says: "I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye."

Beginning in January 1973, we traveled back to Ovapa every other weekend until we could make the move there. We stayed in the home of Brother and Sister Bragg and their many children. Everyone went out of their way to assist us in whatever our needs were. They provided us with contacts for work and where the best places of shopping were (and there were not many). The young boys wanted to even take me "snipe hunting" one evening. I told them, "I don't have a gun." They laughed and said, "Don't need a gun for this!" With an answer like that, I think I knew something was up. I did not go along with it (to their disappointment).

The brethren got to work fast. I must admit they amazed me, and I found their love for the truth and desire for a pastor were the things that seemed to consume their hearts and minds. A single-wide mobile home was found and, in the dead of a bitterly cold February winter, was towed up to Ovapa and placed right behind the church building. Several of the brethren, led by Brother Bragg (who seemed to have the

gift of doing whatever needed to be done), hooked up the trailer to all of its utilities and made it ready for us to move in (almost). I depended so much upon Brother Bragg through the years. I felt very humbled and very blessed as I came to know all these wonderful saints.

Then the time came for me to place my notice at the shipyards. I had a real battle with the flesh in this move, for I really had nothing to replace it with. I had been well satisfied there. I enjoyed my work, and my wife and I were comfortable with life. Then, to give a two-week notice . . . well, I was committed to the Lord's work, and so the flesh had to take a backseat. On March 1, 1973, we loaded an U-Haul with a car dolly for my Plymouth Fury. Leaving Port Deposit and Maryland behind for good, we headed to our new place. We would spend the night at my parent's place in Morgantown, West Virginia. I think it was four brethren who met us there on Saturday morning with three pickup trucks. We left Mom and Dad standing in amazement at such a sight. We were headed for Ovapa at last! We looked as nice as the "Beverly Hillbillies!" Those three pickup trucks were loaded and overloaded and really looked a sight. On the way, Brother Mark O'Dell suggested we stop at Jackson's Mill, which was along the way (perhaps Route 4 or 19). It was here that we all had our first, genuine West Virginia hot dog! It consisted of hot dog, chili, coleslaw, and onions. Whatever happened to ketchup and mustard, I do not know, but I never ate a hot dog that tasted so good. I have been spoiled ever since.

We arrived in Ovapa late in the evening on Saturday, March 2. Most of our possessions were placed in the trailer home, and we moved in with Brother and Sister Bragg until the trailer was completely ready. What a wonderful blessing Sister Bragg was to our family! She really cared for us and was so patient with our many questions and bewilderment about life in West Virginia. The children of the family (and congregation) sure had a lot of fun out of us city-slickers.

I preached my first message as the resident pastor on Sunday, March 3, 1973. Michele was four, and Ricky was two. In one of the first few messages I preached, I made the following statement: "Now,

you folks don't know me, and so I don't expect you to have confidence in me. I will have to gain that respect and confidence over the days and months to come. Also, you need to realize that it's impossible for me to have confidence in you folks for the same reason. I don't know you, and you'll have to gain my confidence." (Young ministers, confidence and respect cannot be *expected* or *demanded* just because you are a minister. It must be earned, and you can lose it much more easily than you can earn it. So, be very careful how you live and conduct the affairs of your life.)

Thus, we began the work of pastoring the saints in Ovapa, West Virginia, living among them, gaining their confidence, and having it reciprocated. The late Brother Jack Dunlap (pastor of the Church of God in South Connellsville, Pennsylvania, at that time) came and held a revival for us in those early years, and he gave me very good advice. One thing he told me was: "Brother Richard, your children are very young. You have a number of teenagers in this congregation. Be very careful of the rules you place on these teenagers, for you will have to hold them on your own children as they become teenagers. You don't have to make a lot of rules. Use rules sparingly. You will have less trouble to deal with." Through the years, I have tried to pastor with those thoughts serving as a guide.

In our early years, funds were low. My job at the shipyards had been paying over seven dollars an hour with all benefits. I could not find work in or around the area where we were living. We lived the first few months on the kindness of the Bragg family and our income tax return for the year. I finally found work at the Old Clendenin Lumber Yard, making one dollar and eighty-seven cents per hour plus commissions. Then, I found a part-time job at the Kroger grocery store. Finally, I was hired on full-time with the state road. Things were looking up, and we were becoming established in the community. I give all praise and honor and glory to the Lord for working all these things out! Serving God has always been full of undeserving rewards and blessings. Praise the Lord!

In 1978, I began driving a school bus for the Clay County Board

of Education and was there until I retired thirty-six years later, in 2014. I really enjoyed bus driving, and it was a perfect job for a pastor. I had the time between 8:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. to visit the hospital or homes, to study, and take care of needs around the home and church. It was really an answer to prayer.

Over the years, we faced many hard and difficult times, as Satan found a way to move into God's place in people's lives. That is why the Apostle Paul warned us in Ephesians 4:27, "Neither give place to the devil." Satan is so sly; he is no respecter of persons. Oh, the havoc he can cause once he becomes lodged in someone's heart! Look at what he caused Ananias and his wife to do in Acts 5:3. It says, "But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?" Then concerning Judas, John 13:27 reads: "And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly."

Yet, we had some wonderful times. We were a congregation well-blessed with giving people. The finances grew, and we could have several revivals every year. We hosted our first fellowship meeting September 1974. In later years, we had a number of wintertime fellowship meetings on Friday evenings. We served soup and sandwiches to our guests. God blessed in a wonderful way, and saints from several congregations were richly blessed by attending these various meetings.

It seems many times, after times of great rejoicing, there follows great hardships. Brother George Wills once told me, "Brother Richard, when you have a victory, rejoice and celebrate it, because they are few and far between." Many times I remembered that remark as we experienced some of the same hardships.

Young pastor, realize that people can and may change, even those you think are your strongest saints. I have found out that you can go from *hero to zero* in less than twenty-four hours. Many times, the ones with whom you spend the most time counseling, encouraging, and helping to work out their troubles are often the ones who turn on you. These are the times when you need to have that reassurance that God has "called" you, and that you are in His will. That is often the only

thing that will keep you encouraged!

A congregation needs a steady hand to guide it through all the changing turmoil and the tragedies that it will face. Life as a pastor is not always easy. It is full of stress. The pressures are many. Young man, you must know that you are "*called*" to such a position, so you may stand steadfast in the gap, while the battle is raging hot all around you. You must do all you can to watch over, care for, and protect your flock.

Here is some good counsel that I gleaned from messages preached by our late Brother Emerson Wilson:

1. If you will keep the good sheep healthy, the sick ones will usually come along. But if you neglect the healthy ones by merely preaching to the problem makers, soon all the sheep will be spiritually sick.
2. It is easy to get in the pulpit on Sunday morning and find fault and criticize your congregation. On the other hand, it takes a lot of prayer and study to get a message from God to feed your sheep. Even though there are issues you know need to be dealt with, God will lead you into the right timing for that. Our main work is to feed and strengthen the flock, not to lambaste and tear it down.

This advice truly helped me many times to stay focused on feeding the flock. When Jesus told John in John 21:16 to "Feed my sheep," we must understand what all that meant. *Feeding* means to "tend to, to serve, to wait upon" through the preaching of the Word. It also means showing your care, concern of, and compassion toward each individual saint.

As a pastor, you will be used, abused, and misunderstood. Do not look for or expect compliments or words of encouragement, for they will be scarce. However, there are definite times of reward! You will feel the power of God being manifested and the saints rejoicing, and after working with a precious soul for many hours or days, you will

finally see Satan defeated, and see that soul truly gain the victory. This makes everything worthwhile!

You will make mistakes while pastoring. I made my share of them. Sometimes I had to make public apologies to my congregation for being wrong concerning a certain thing. We must maintain a well-oiled reverse gear. We must do as we preach and expect others to do the same. Do not be afraid to say: "I'm sorry. Will you please forgive me?" Believe it or not, instead of hurting your confidence, it will build a stronger bond between you and the congregation. We must practice what we preach.

As I have said earlier, when we first moved to Ovapa, things were tight financially for us, but we never missed paying our tithe and offerings to the Lord. God faithfully saw us through those times. I can remember saving up soda pop bottles and returning them to the Kroger grocery store for the ten cent refund. We would then use that to purchase what we could to help the family. But God was good!

The congregation, as it grew in number and more importantly in quality of spiritual living, God blessed financially, and they took very good care of us. Most were very considerate and thoughtful. As always, as God blesses in any congregation, Satan is hard at work. He knows how to lay his traps and hide his pitfalls and snares, situations that could cause anyone to become ensnared in. He is always looking for ways and means to disturb the peace and harmony of congregations. Pastors must always guard themselves from the danger of complacency! Always be watchful and in much prayer, constantly seeking divine guidance. The cry may go forth: "Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" (Isaiah 21:11). Oh, what a responsibility set upon the watchman's shoulders!

Pastors, both young and old, new in the calling or with many years of experience, there will be problems even within the walls of your own home or among your scattered family. These you must face and deal with, for nothing is secret very long. Never give the impression that you are covering up a wrong done by a family member. Never try to hide something you would be upset with your congregation doing.

It is best to always be open and above board with your saints. You expect the same from them. (Remember, you live in a "glass house.") Also, you must never allow personal problems to bleed over into your preaching or influence the way you pastor the congregation. You will offend your flock.

God always knows how to comfort and strengthen us when we are going through storms of life. My wife had three miscarriages, two of them while in Ovapa. The last baby was five months in the womb when God called him home. She gave birth to an infant boy there in the parsonage, and one brother took the baby out and buried him for us. We have no idea where. That was a hard time, especially for my wife.

Soon God blessed us again with another unexpected blessing. This time the Lord gave us a baby girl, and we named her Natalie. She was perfect and beautiful. What a blessing she was! She was just what my wife needed. We felt as though God had given her to us as a "special blessing." She was born on Mother's Day, May 9, 1976. My dad passed away August of that same year at fifty-nine. He was able to hold Natalie once before passing. Brother O'Dell also passed away that same year. I have dearly missed my dad and Brother O'Dell.

Despite all Satan was doing, God never failed to pour out His Spirit upon us. We had the most wonderful services with much rejoicing and praising God. We were blessed with many saints visiting us from various congregations during our revivals and special meetings, and the Lord always blessed us beyond measure. The years came and went. Swiftly did they fly. What a joy it was to witness many souls turning from darkness into the marvelous light, making a grand entrance into the Kingdom of God! There were marriages to perform, funerals to officiate, and my wife and I were at the hospital to help parents welcome their newborn babies into the world. We prayed and held on in prayer for those in their sicknesses. We waited at the bedside with others in their last hours. We spent many hours in counseling and many hours sitting in hospital rooms to comfort the sick and suffering. We shared with broken hearts the goodness of our Lord and Savior. We told them how He cares for His own! I have never regret-

ted my work as pastor in any way. I borrow these words from the Apostle Paul, written in 1 Timothy 1:12, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry."

When first taking the work in Ovapa, I made the statement in the early days of preaching that I would pastor the work as if I were to be there for twenty years. In other words, I knew I was where God wanted me to be. I had no intention of leaving until God released the burden upon my heart. I would like to mention here that there were several brethren along with their wives and families who stood solid and strong down through the years. They are Brother Rocky and Sister Sharon Boggs and family, Sister Mandy Vaughn and her children, Jordan and Kaylee. Brother Rocky and Sister Sharon were young teenagers, and they were saved and lived for the Lord. They were faithful all down through their years. They were truly devoted to God and the congregation. Then, God added to the work Brother Eddie and Sister Kitty Lawson. They were with us for many years, and they were also very faithful and true. What a blessing Brother Eddie was in leading the singing and teaching the adult Sunday school class. He served many years as a helper in filling the pulpit for me.

God also called dear Brother and Sister Cadle out of false religion. When they were added to the church, they fell in love with the truth and remained faithful until God called Brother Cadle to his eternal reward in December 2013. Sister Cadle stands faithful yet today. All these were with us for many years, and each of them, in their own special way, were such a great blessing to me, as their pastor, and also to my family down through the years. They were not only saints in the Lord, but became dear friends as well. Our prayer is that God richly reward them for their love for God and the truth! Those twenty years I mentioned more than doubled into forty-three and one-half years! God permitted us to pastor the work in Ovapa, West Virginia, from January 1, 1973, until the last message I preached as their pastor on May 22, 2016.

As I bring this narrative to a close, the reader (I am sure) under-

stands that this short book barely skims the surface of those forty-three years in pastoring. On the positive side, the **JOY, HAPPINESS, and REJOICING** of souls saved, victories won, and devils defeated causes the dark places to fade away in the light of God's divine work. Thus, we can truly say with the psalmist, "This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes" (Psalm 118:23).

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I trust you have read this in the spirit in which it was written: solely for the encouragement of others, giving all praise and glory to our precious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

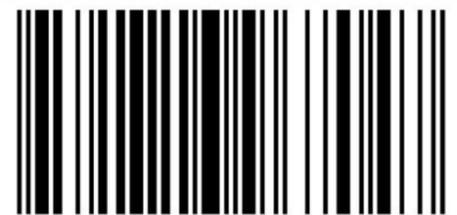
THE OFFICE OF A BISHOP

"This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Timothy 3:1).

In this book, I have endeavored to draw upon my own experience of how I felt the call of God upon my soul, heart, and mind. The Apostle Paul emphasized that it is good to desire such a work as the ministry. My purpose is to help others understand their call, to understand that desire for the office of a bishop, and to not be ashamed of such a longing, for the Apostle Paul said, "He desireth a good work."



Richard E. Talbot, Sr, and his wife Diana began pastoring in Ovapa, West Virginia, in March of 1973. They labored there for forty-three and one-half years. The author and his wife currently live and worship with the Church of God congregation located in Mt. Pleasant Pennsylvania, with his daughter Michele and her husband, Pastor Paul Prinkey.



9781716967047