

# Memories (Part 3)

This section of my personal memories deals in large part (not exclusively) with ministry-related memories rather than personal ones, and covers a period of some 20 years from 1995 until the present. I include it because, number one, these are special memories in my life, and secondly, they testify to the faithfulness and leading of God as Judy and I endeavored to be obedient to our calling as believers, spouses, parents, and missionaries.

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## Russia

We were in the process of completing our fourth term of service in Panama when a phone call came from Brother Eugene Waddell, director of the Foreign (now International) Missions Department. Would Judy and I consider transferring from Panama to Russia? After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, God had opened doors to Russia and all the former Soviet Union countries, and there was the possibility of Free Will Baptists partnering with the Russian Baptist Union, most of whom were very close to us doctrinally. This was the spring of 1995.''

As we finished up that term and came to the states, with plans to visit Russia with someone from the mission that year, our feeling was that we would be transferring. I picked up some Russian grammar books, a traveler's course, and other resources, thinking that would help prepare me. By the time we went in October 1995, I had learned several phrases and lots of individual words.

The trip was unforgettable. We traveled with Jimmy Aldridge (Overseas Secretary with FWB International Mission) and Galen Dunbar (board member). We met Brother Nicolai Sobolev, pastor and leader in the Russian Baptist Union, and what a wonderful host he was! We traveled from Moscow to Chelyabinsk, and then

to Yekaterinburg. We attended a conference in Moscow with many Russian pastors and leaders, and a number of expatriates. What a humbling experience to listen to Russian pastors relate their experiences of time spent in prison, torture and isolation. Their faithfulness to our God came through in their testimonies. Through impossible situations, they labored to keep the church alive in Russia.

As a result of that amazing conference, and through an extended season of prayer and reflection, we reluctantly told Brother Waddell that we didn't feel the Lord's leading to go to Russia. At that time, we did not know why God said no. A year or so later, Mike and Cathy Corley were appointed to do what we were asked to do and they did it so much better than we could have!. He knew Russian and could begin ministry without the years of language study. Don't second guess God. His ways are always perfect.

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### **Director of Field Operations**

In not choosing to go to Russia, we opted to return to Panama for a fifth term. That concluded in the middle of 1999, and we moved to Nashville to be near our oldest two sons (Michael was married and Phillip was a senior at Welch), and to enroll David in Bible College. Stateside assignment usually lasted a year or so, and involved visiting churches, speaking in mission conferences, attending associational meetings, and other mission-related opportunities. I was in western Missouri in an area-wide mission conference when one unusually warm November afternoon I received a call from James Forlines, who had become General Director of the Mission in 1998.

Bro. James told me he was considering me as a possibility for the Foreign Missions (now International Missions) administrative staff. Was I interested and willing to be considered? I could take some time and think and pray, talk it

over with Judy, etc. We prayed earnestly, considered the possibilities and implications as to what it would mean for us, and in early January 2000, I called and told Bro. James that if he selected me for the position, I would accept. In mid-January, I became the Director of Field Operations.

It was my role to supervise and coordinate the efforts of our field personnel. I had an office in Nashville, and from there traveled to approximately 20 countries over the next eight years. It was truly a great adventure, a challenge beyond anything I could have imagined. Thanks to the Lord's enablement, I was a part of several initiatives that enabled us as a people to have a greater impact around the world: partnership with Bible Mission International in Central Asia, the creation of the position of Regional Director which served us well for a number of years, although it has now been eliminated, the creation of the Hanna Project, and ongoing efforts with our international Free Will Baptist family. One of my most special memories was going to Bulgaria with Clint Morgan and Tim Awtrey to survey that country as a potential field of service for our mission, and later making that recommendation to our Board. The Board approved opening Bulgaria, and today, nearly 15 years later, God is working there in a mighty way through four missionary couples and a growing number of Bulgarian believers.

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### **The International Fellowship of Free Will Baptist Churches, Inc**

In 1992 a historic event happened for Free Will Baptists around the world. Panama was host to a consultation that would bring representatives from a number of countries where our missionaries served. Spearheaded by Dr. Melvin Worthington, Executive Secretary of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, USA, the consultation became the catalyst for an international movement.

The International Fellowship of Free Will Baptist Churches, Inc. was officially organized in 1995 in Brazil. They decided to meet every three years. I missed the 1995 and 1998 meetings in Brazil and Uruguay, respectively, but starting in 2002 (we skipped 2001 because it was so close to the terrorist attacks of 9-11), I attended every meeting through 2010, plus a number of executive committee meetings on off years as a translator-advisor, or as a member of the committee. Bro. Worthington decided to postpone the next session until 2002, and we met near Nashville, Tennessee at Camp Garner Creek. We met in Panama in 2004, France in 2007, and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 2010.

We'd basically meet every three years or so for a general assembly. The other years I would help coordinate an executive committee meeting, sometimes as a liaison and sometimes as a member of that committee. Working with men like Gerardo Acevedo (Uruguay), José Manuel Parrón (Spain), Luis Felipe Tijerina (México), and others remains a joy I can't adequately describe and has led to some treasured friendships as well.

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## **Panamá, Part II**

God is truly a God of surprises. I had served as Director of Field Operations at International Missions, truly loved it, and was able to visit around 20 countries during those years. However, I was having some health issues (turned out to be sleep apnea at the time, and later some more problems), and I also began to sense some unrest in my spirit that perhaps it was time to leave and find a different ministry. The Lord graciously opened doors. I would leave the position of DFO, but stay on with the Mission. The original plan was to stay involved with the International Fellowship of Free Will Baptist Churches and help countries that had received the gospel from Free Will Baptist in the United States develop plans and strategies to begin sending out their own cross-

cultural missionaries. At the same time, it was felt that Judy and I should have a field ministry somewhere, so we decided to divide that role between Panama (helping the Bowermans at the seminary) and Uruguay (teaching Bible institute classes). However, by the end of 2008, Eddie's health had deteriorated, and he was going to have to return stateside immediately and go on a liver transplant waiting list. We made a trip to Panama in early January 2009 to meet with Eddie and LaRhonda Bowerman getting a crash course in the operations of the Seminary in Chame. Someone would need to assume leadership of the seminary, and it seemed that the Lord had brought us back to Panama for that hour. We served the next five-plus years in Chame, which turned out to be some of the most rewarding years of ministry. But it was not easy. The daily schedule was exhausting, on call 24/7, readjusting to the heat and humidity of Panama, and responsibilities without number. My undiagnosed health problems also left me extremely tired most of the time. Only God can be credited with giving us strength for each new day.

Judy had some flowers planted around the porch of the dorm where we were living. The beautiful small purple flowers bloomed every morning and then faded away in the heat of the day. Judy said they reminded her of Lamentations 3:23, "They (God's mercies) are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness." It was a reminder every morning when we walked out the door, that God is faithful and His mercy to us is new and refreshing each day.

Another blessing to us was how God sent us Ariadna and Lazaro Riesgo from Cuba to help us in the seminary! "God sent" is putting it lightly! They came and stepped in immediately relieving us of many of the duties we had.

Also, the churches in Panama were seeing the importance of the seminary and taking ownership. Pastors were willing to dedicate two days a week to teach classes and this was essential. We had students in three different years so it was

necessary to have three classes simultaneously. Not only was it a great help to us but the students learned from seasoned pastors. Another benefit was the pastors caught the vision and shared it with their congregations.

It is hard to believe that we're talking about nearly 20 years here. From a middle-aged couple with children still at home to watching those same children grow up, go off to college (all went to Free Will Baptist Bible College, now Welch College), meet their future spouse, get married, and start their own family. Now we're grandparents, several times over, but "greatly blessed, highly favored." As the old saying goes, "how time has flown!"

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## **Bethany**

A highlight of 2014 for us was our trip to Peru to see David, Bethany, and their three children; Isaac, Jude, and Naomi. Peru is a beautiful country, Lima is a fascinating city, and being with the kids was special. We actually had them to ourselves for a few days while David and Bethany went away to have a short vacation and celebrate their 10th anniversary. The next time we saw them was just before Christmas 2014 when they flew in to spend their Christmas break with the Lytles Bethany's family in the Huntsville Alabama area. How could I ever forget the night Bethany told us she might have cancer? She didn't feel well from the time they arrived, and kept getting worse. Judy and I were to have gone to Panama on January 7 for a special "Passing the Baton" meeting that weekend in which International Missions was turning the work there over entirely to the National church. Because Bethany was feeling so bad, Judy decided not to go and went down to Huntsville, AL with Sheila Sass. I was to go on to Panama, but that very morning David called to say that cancer had spread throughout Bethany's body. I got the message en route to the airport, so I canceled my trip, went down to Alabama that

morning straight to the hospital. Bethany went home to be with Jesus the next morning around 2:30.

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## **Epilogue**

I told one of the editors of Rambling Ever On that the Epilogue would be relatively short. We left Panama as missionaries assigned to that field in 2014 and retired from the Mission in June 2015. Growing health concerns led to an MRI which revealed that I have Intracranial Hypotension, a spinal fluid loss, which causes the brain to sag and, in my case, led to severe headaches, especially when preaching, lack of balance which caused me to not be able to walk a straight line, and even speed up, trip, and fall. To that, we could add lethargy, slurred speech, and delayed reactions that at times made it dangerous to drive. God has been merciful, and though it took a while, we've learned that getting horizontal and resting every day has helped tremendously.

Judy and I have both had a number of health issues, mostly minor, and for that we praise the Lord. It's all part of the aging process. Speaking of aging, our pastor at Cofer's Chapel, Allen Pointer, asked us to serve on staff at the church part time and work with the senior adults and to begin a ministry to internationals. God has allowed us to start a Hispanic ministry, and we now have around 30 Spanish-speaking folks to whom we minister, and whom we're seeking to fully integrate into the life of our church. It's also exciting to get to know our seniors better, especially since we are a part of the group!

At this stage of life, watching our grandkids be born and grow is truly one of life's greatest blessings. We have nine, with another on the way.

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# You Don't Know Who Ty Cobb Was?

A baseball great. Record holder. In the first class of Hall of Fame players inducted in 1936. Lifetime batting average of .366 – the highest of all time. Three times batted over .400 for a season. Possibly the greatest player of the early 1900s.

Violent temper with a reputation for viciousness and thought to be a racist.

Some recent studies seem to indicate that some of the things thought to be true about him may not have been factual. (This may have been due to an inept and extremely biased biographer.)

Earlier biographers depicted Cobb as extremely violent, sharpening his spikes and endeavoring to slide into other players and cut them. He is said to have attacked blacks and sought to inflict bodily harm on them. Even Ken Burns of the famous video series *Baseball*, presented that picture of Ty Cobb. In the movie "Field of Dreams," the ghost player Shoeless Joe Jackson talks about not inviting Cobb to come to the magical field because "we hated the \_\_\_\_."

More recent studies seem to show that he was not hatefully racist, was respected by teammates and opponents alike and tried to graciously reach out to fans. He was, according to Charles Leershen, in "Ty Cobb: A Terrible Beauty," an extremely complex man, far from perfect, but not guilty of many of the things alleged in earlier biographies.

Ty Cobb was born in Georgia in 1886, just 21 years after the Civil War ended. He played for the Detroit Tigers, and because



of his attitudes and actions, and being a Southerner, he may have created more problems for himself than he should have.

Interestingly enough, Jackie Robinson, who broke the color barrier in 1947, was also born in Georgia, 33 years after Ty Cobb. And recent information would seem to show that Cobb was not against African Americans playing in the major leagues. "The Negro should be accepted wholeheartedly, and not grudgingly," he said. "The Negro has the right to play professional baseball and whose [sic] to say he has not?" And he was proved correct in the years that followed as African Americans reshaped the all-time baseball statistics from that point forward.

Now while I am sure there are those who do, it is likely that most people in China, India, or the heart of Africa would not know who Ty Cobb really was; in fact, he or she would never have even heard of him. Fame is not only fleeting, it's also limited by time and place. In this case, the real and total truth about Tyrus Raymond Cobb is known only to God.

Historical facts, anecdotes, trivia and the like, are interesting, at least to some people, at certain times, and in at least a few places. They do serve as good attention grabbers, make for memorable illustrations, and help transition us to consider more important things. But only one bit of information and only one Individual makes any real difference.

It's not Ty Cobb who must be known – it's Jesus! Jesus, Name above all names. Jesus, who said of Himself "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the father but by me." Jesus, supernatural birth, sinless life, sacrificial death, and glorious, bodily resurrection, all to save people from their sins. Jesus, of whom it was said: "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved."

If Ty Cobb remains unknown except for a small group of baseball aficionados and historians, it will make virtually no difference. But if Jesus is not known – and received – there are eternal consequences. He tells us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. His name is to be proclaimed in all the earth.

Last, but certainly not least: we must clearly and accurately communicate the message. If indeed historians have missed the boat on what kind of person Ty Cobb was – intentionally or accidentally – that is sad, to be sure. However to miss the message of Jesus, or to transmit or receive a distorted message, is tragic.

There are still hundreds of millions of people who are not only unreached with the gospel – the only message that can save them, remember – but are still unengaged in the sense that no believer or group of believers is plotting a strategy to engage them with the gospel. There remain some 1,600 languages and dialects that do not have even a portion of the Bible. Thankfully, major efforts are underway to change that and get the Word to them in their tongue.

Ty Cobb was a great baseball player and a complicated person and while it is interesting to know who he really was and what he accomplished, that knowledge holds temporal importance. The same cannot be said about the most significant person to walk the face of the earth – Jesus Christ. We are to know Him and to make Him known to the uttermost ends of the earth. We should proclaim the Good News about Jesus with clarity, accuracy, and consistency. There is nothing more eternally significant than this.

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# La Himnodia Latinoamericana

Hace un mes, una amiga aquí en Nashville que fue bibliotecaria en Welch por más de 30 años, puso una sugerencia en su pared de Facebook. Hablando de la bendición que son para los hijos de Dios los himnos y otras canciones cristianas, pidió que todo aquel que quisiera pusiera el nombre de alguna canción favorita y que incluyera porqué le gustaba tanto esa canción. ¡Muchísima gente respondió! Viendo los nombres de aquellos himnos y leyendo los testimonios fue de mucha bendición y edificación espiritual para mí, y según los comentarios que leí, para muchos más.

Ahora, yo quisiera poner algo en español, pidiendo prestado el concepto de mi amiga.

En mi opinión, en ninguna parte del mundo hay mejor himnodia que en América Latina.

Comenzando con los himnos que llegaron a Centro y Sudamérica de América del Norte y de Europa, las iglesias evangélicas han cantado "En La Cruz," "Cuando Allá Se Pase Lista," "Oh Tu Fidelidad," y "Cuán Grande Es Él," y mil himnos más, llenando sus cultos con alabanzas al Todopoderoso. Traducidos del inglés, han enriquecido la vida espiritual y la adoración congregacional del pueblo hispano por más de cien años."

Autores hispanos como el famoso Alfredo Colom de Guatemala escribieron canciones inolvidables para el pueblo latinoamericano. "Manos Cariñosas," "Pero Queda Cristo," conocido popularmente como "Por la Mañana Yo Dirijo mi Alabanza," "Canten con Alegría," y "A La Victoria Jesús Nos Llama." Colom nació en 1904. En su juventud era mujeriego, alcohólico y pecador perdido. Cuando conoció a Cristo, su vida fue transformada.

El himnario "Celebremos Su Gloria" destaca dos famosos músicos, himnólogos de antaño: Alfredo Colom y Roberto

Savage. Savage era norteamericano pero durante muchos años de su ministerio sirvió como misionero en Ecuador en la emisora HCJB, y dio a luz a proyectos musicales que incluían la serie "Adelante Juventud, himnos, coritos y cánticos espirituales que guió al pueblo latinoamericano en sus alabanzas al Señor. Hizo compilaciones de música de varios países y arreglos que eran fáciles de cantar. El impacto que se sentía por los esfuerzos de estos dos siervos es incalculable.

Otros nombres destacados de otra generación: Santiago Stevenson, el trovador panameño (A La Casa de Jairo Iba Jesús), Danny Berrios, Stanislao Marino, y Juan Romero ("Visión Pastoral," o "Eran Cien Ovejas") entre muchos de las décadas de los 70 y 80. Más recientemente, Marcos Witt, Juan Adrián Romero, Marcos Barrientos y Marcos Vidal nos han dado nuevas canciones, muchas, y el pueblo sigue alabando al Señor.

Pero los Latinoamericanos también crearon una multitud de coritos y canciones en español. No he visto ni conocido otro continente u otra cultura que haya producido más música original. Canciones espirituales, salmos abundan. (Piensen en "Si Fui Motivo de Dolor," ""Más Allá del Sol," ""Alabaré,," y salmos como el 145, 3:3-4, 25, 92 ("Bueno es alabarte oh Jehová") La lista es interminable.

Me impresionó mucho cómo la gente respondió al blog de mi amiga en inglés. Me gustaría invitarles a ustedes que respondan a este blog, indicando su canción, o canciones favoritas, y diciendo por qué le gusta esa canción en particular. Estoy seguro que será de mucha bendición.

Termino con una canción – una de mis favoritas. No es necesariamente mi favorita absoluta, pero es linda, y la letra expresa grandes verdades. Muchos de ustedes la conocen – "Día en Día."

*Día en día Cristo está conmigo,  
Me consuela en el medio del dolor.*

*Pues confiando en su poder eterno,  
No me afano ni me da temor.  
Sobrepuja todo entendimiento  
La perfecta luz del Salvador.  
En su amor tan grande e infinito  
Me dará lo que es mejor.*

*Día en día Cristo me acompaña  
Y me brinda dulce comunión  
Todos mis cuidados él los lleva;  
A él le entrego mi alma y corazón.  
No hay medida del amor supremo  
De mi bondadoso y fiel Pastor  
Él me suple lo que necesito  
Pues el pan de vida es mi Señor.*

*Oh Señor, ayúdame este día  
A vivir de tal manera aquí.  
Que tu nombre sea glorificado  
Pues anhelo honrarte solo a ti.  
Con la diestra de tu gran justicia  
Me sustentas en la turbación.  
Tus promesas son sostén y guía  
Siempre en ellas hay consolación.*

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## **Forgiveness**

“Cutting someone a little slack.” “Showing grace.” “Giving a second chance.”

All of these phrases interest me a great deal in terms of relationships.

There is a difference between cutting someone some slack or

covering a multitude of sins, and forgiving wrongs done to us or others. The latter involves a definite transgression, a sin, a crime, even, and most of the time only those who are resting in their forgiveness in spite of the enormity of their sins against a Holy God, can extend forgiveness to others who neither deserve it or in some cases even want it. The former is more of the nature of overlooking, not making a big deal of others faults and frequent mistakes. Both are marks of a Christian who walks in fellowship with God, as is also our subsequent treatment of people we've said we forgive. Hence, the following simple outline for this devotional thought:

- 1. Overlooking faults (I Peter 4:8 – “love covers a multitude of sins.”)**
- 2. Forgiving (Matthew 18, Luke 17, Colossians 3:12-13)**
- 3. Treating others as forgiven.**

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### **Overlooking faults**

I personally have come to the conclusion that I want to stop saying “I don't like... (fill in the blank with whatever: genre of music, style of preaching, sports team, etc...). If it's in the realm of preferences, not biblical and moral values, I want to say “I prefer,” or “I like,” and not run down others' opinions. Most things do not rise above the level of simple preference (Think: musical tastes). Some things do, obviously, and must be defended, refuted, fought over, but even there, in the right attitude. Other things are just what one person likes better, and another person likes less.

When Peter reminds us that love covers a multitude of sins, it's as the ESV Study Bible states: “Where love abounds, offenses are frequently overlooked and quickly forgiven.” (1 Peter 4:8)

Going beyond negativity in the area of preferences and offenses, I want to be Christlike in the matter of

forgiveness. I want to overlook minor faults, and gently address major ones after having gotten the beam out of my own eye (Matthew 7). I am convinced that my dealing with myself first, a firm attitude with self, in which my own weaknesses, sins, and hangups get the most attention, will enable me to be more accepting of my brother. I must learn to move past minor differences, letting love triumph over them, and bring us together.

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### **Forgiveness (Matthew 18:18-35, Luke 17:1-4)**

I want to forgive from the heart, as I have been so graciously forgiven, undeserving though I am. If Matthew 18 doesn't stop us cold in our tracks as far as forgiveness is concerned, I don't know what will. We who have been forgiven the thousands of talents – an overwhelming debt – by our loving Lord, must forgive wrongs done to us, even as we've been forgiven. Peter thought he was really going the distance when he spoke of forgiving seven times until Jesus said it must be seventy times seven.

Pastor Daryl Grimes writes of his brother who was murdered more than 30 years ago, and of the man who killed him. "Forgiveness is important. I don't know when it happened but there was a time in my life that I had to let go of the bitterness and hatred I had for this man. Hating him will not bring my brother back nor will it do anything but destroy me...Jesus died for him, too."

Consider these examples from Scripture:

- Joseph and his brothers. – "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good..." (Genesis 50)
- Stephen and murderers. "Lord lay not this sin to their charge." (Acts 7:55)
- Jesus and those who crucified Him. "Father, forgive

them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

A couple of examples from modern history, one from 50 years ago, and the other from recent weeks. First, the Vietnamese girl who was burned by napalm. Her remarkable story can be found in *Fire Road: The Napalm Girl's Journey Through the Horrors of War to Faith, Forgiveness & Peace*. For those of us old enough to remember the Vietnam War, we will remember Phan Thi Phuc, running down a street with her body on fire from a napalm bomb.

*Against all odds, Kim lived—but her journey toward healing was only beginning. When the napalm bombs dropped, everything Kim knew and relied on exploded along with them: her home, her country's freedom, her childhood innocence and happiness.*

*The coming years would be marked by excruciating treatments for her burns and unrelenting physical pain throughout her body, which were constant reminders of that terrible day. Kim survived the pain of her body ablaze, but how could she possibly survive the pain of her devastated soul? Kim says she was following the religion she grew up with, but didn't know “the real God.” She says God still knew her, though.*

*“The real God, He knows my heart. Ten years later I was just seeking the truth and looking for the answer, ‘Why me?’” she says.*

*“I found a Bible in the library in Saigon. At that time I wanted to die, I was so full of bitterness and anger and hatred,” she says.*

*But that's when she found Christ. After a lifelong battle with physical and emotional pain, she says, “God gave me peace and joy.”*

*Fire Road is the true story of how she found the answer in a God who suffered Himself; a Savior who truly understood and cared about the depths of her pain. Fire Road is a story of*



*horror and hope, a harrowing tale of a life changed in an instant—and the power and resilience that can only be found in the power of God’s mercy and love.*

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More recently, the story of gymnast Rachel Denhollander, sexually abused by Dr. Larry Nassar, who both challenged him to repent and also forgave the man who abused her. Her words to her abuser:

*“In our early hearings, you brought your Bible into the courtroom and you have spoken of praying for forgiveness. And so it is on that basis that I appeal to you. If you have read the Bible you carry, you know the definition of sacrificial love portrayed is of God Himself loving so sacrificially that He gave up everything to pay a penalty for the sin He did not commit. By His grace, I, too, choose to love this way.*

*You spoke of praying for forgiveness. But, Larry, if you have read the Bible you carry, you know forgiveness does not come from doing good things as if good deeds can erase what you have done. It comes from repentance which requires facing and acknowledging the truth about what you have done in all of its utter depravity and horror without mitigation, without excuse, without acting as if good deeds can erase what you have seen in this courtroom today.*

*The Bible [speaks of] a final judgment where all of God’s wrath and eternal terror is poured out on men like you. Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the Gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. And it will be there for you.*

*I pray you experience the soul-crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience true repentance and true*

*forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me – though I extend that to you as well.”*

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### **Treating others as forgiven**

I want to treat others as forgiven, not just say the words. How we act toward others speaks volumes. The fruit of the Spirit that includes gentleness, goodness, and meekness are so indicative of our relationship with Christ and whether or not we are led by His Spirit. Truly forgiving will involve a change in our attitude toward others. Paul reminds us in Colossians 3 that we are to “put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also are to forgive.” I think that treating others as forgiven flows from resting and rejoicing in our own forgiveness. The three points are interrelated and joined firmly; if I am able to cut others some slack, to forgive a multitude of sins because I’m loved by God and know that I am, and can, therefore, accept and tolerate differences and even disagreements, I have taken a huge step toward a joyful, balanced life. Going beyond that, if I can truly forgive even major sins against me because He has forgiven me all my sins, I truly live in freedom. Treating others as forgiven then means that I treat others on the basis of forgiveness and acceptance. That’s freedom and release!

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So how do we want to live? It really is up to us, to a great extent. We have the Guidebook, the Scriptures. We have the Inner Guide, the Holy Spirit. And we have a Savior who models this for us, and encourages us on to victory.

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# Memories (Part 2)

As I continue to recall memories, I should point out that these are selective and representative. There are many more, but these stand out to illustrate the faithfulness of God in both good and bad times. (Read Part One [here](#).)

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## The Sweet Fellowship of College

“Yesterday, Today, Forever” was a medley of songs popular during my college years at the Free Will Baptist Bible College, [1. Welch College now.] that we dorm students would sing during informal gatherings. One evening, around 1970 or 1971, as the students frequently did, we’d gathered in front of the sliding curtain opening into the dining hall (where the student lounge and later “Common Grounds” were) about five minutes to six, and as was often the case, we started to sing:

*Yesterday, Today, Forever Jesus is the same.*

*All may change, but Jesus never, glory to His name!*

*Glory to His name, glory to His name.*

*All may change but Jesus never, glory to His name!*

*Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.*

*Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.*

*Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss*

*Walking down streets of purest gold, living in a land where*

*we'll never grow old.*

*Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss  
I like Bible College down here, but Heaven is better than,  
Heaven is better than*

*Heaven is better than this.*

*This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through*

*My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue.*

*The angels beckon me to Heaven's golden shore,*

*And I can't feel at home in this world any more.*

*More, more about Jesus, more, more about Jesus*

*More of His saving fullness see, more of His love who died for  
me.*

*It's me, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer*

*It's me, it's me oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.*

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, that calls me from  
a world of care*

*And bids me at my Father's throne make all my wants and wishes  
known.*

*In seasons of distress and grief, my soul has often found  
relief*

*And oft escaped the tempter's snare, by thy return, sweet hour  
of prayer.*

With a key word, one song would flow into the next:  
name...name, Heaven...Heaven,

This...this, more...more, and prayer...prayer. That particular night, though, as we approached the final song, there seemed to be a holy hush, a sense of God's Spirit. The curtain came open well before the end. The dining hall hostess stood there smiling. She didn't hush our singing and call for someone to ask the blessing right away. Instead, she joined us as we finished out the medley with the the beautiful and poignant "Sweet Hour of Prayer," and then we prayed and went into the dining hall to eat. A beautiful moment, a precious memory, which to me highlights the camaraderie, the sweet fellowship, the closeness of our student body during our unforgettable college years.

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### **First Visit to Cuba**

It was the summer of 1986. We had just come home from our second term in Panama to begin stateside assignment. Brother Eugene Waddell, who had recently been named as General Director of Free Will Baptist Foreign Missions, called me, and asked me if I would go with him to Cuba to be his interpreter/translator. I felt greatly honored to be asked to go. Over the years, we had met a number of our FWB people from Cuba who migrated to Panama en route to the United States. I'd heard so much about the country and the church there. In addition, visits from the US to Cuba were very infrequent, and no one from the Mission office had gone in nearly thirty years.

It was one of the most unforgettable weeks of my life. We were in Pinar del Río, at the site where the seminary had operated for almost 20 years up until the time of the Cuban revolution. Since that time it had been closed, and the government would not allow the seminary to reopen. Eugene Waddell spoke several times during the youth camp we were attending; the FWB Church in Cuba was still permitted to use the facility for camps and conventions. Never have I seen such

anointing or heard such pertinent messages as those he brought that week. His messages from the book of Daniel, and how God used this young man and his three friends as witnesses in a foreign, hostile culture, tremendously blessed and encouraged our Cuban brothers and sisters, especially the youth.

We laughed, we cried, we worshipped, and we forged friendships that would last for a lifetime and into eternity. There were also strategic discussions and the working out of a viable strategy for the Mission to again become involved in the life of the Cuban church, but in a healthy way that would honor our brothers and not create unhealthy dependency. What has resulted in Cuba these past 30 years owes much to the wisdom God gave to Bro. Waddell and Bro. Gilberto Díaz, who was president of the Cuban Association.

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### **The 1989 US Invasion of Panama**

Things had been hot and chaotic in Panama since 1987, when frequent demonstrations started taking place against the dictatorship that had ruled the country since October 1968. Then, in early 1988, the U.S. froze Panamanian assets in an effort to force dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega to step down, and charged him with drug trafficking and other illegal activities. Banks closed, and we had difficulty getting money to even buy groceries. Things calmed down a bit, but then in May, 1989, after Noriega had the presidential election annulled when it was evident that the opposing candidate had one, violence erupted, and images of Guillermo Endara and Guillermo "Billy" Ford beaten and bloodied by Noriega's thugs flashed across the television screen. The tension grew almost daily.

Judy shares the following memory:

*Since public transportation was so difficult during this time,*

*one afternoon, I decided to take our friend Lola to a bus stop closer to her house so she wouldn't have to wait for hours. We were chatting in the car as we arrived to the area called San Miguelito. Suddenly, we were in the middle of a political demonstration. The traffic was totally stopped. I looked around. There was a river of cars in front of us, behind us and on both sides. The angry mob was shouting, "Kill the Gringos, kill the Gringos." There was no escape. The car had tinted windows, thank the Lord, because one protester approached my car and laid his AK-47 right on the hood and continued to shout! Lola was praying like there was no tomorrow and I was saying a few prayers myself. Just as suddenly as we found ourselves in this horribly frightening situation, it seemed like God parted the Red Sea. That river of cars opened up and I didn't wait to see if the traffic light was red or green. I gunned it and we were out of there safe and sound. Only God could do that!*

There were a couple of coup attempts to have Noriega step down, which failed and resulted in Noriega's men being killed. October and November slowly went, the tension growing, and no one knowing what might happen. Noriega shook a machete in the face of the United States, and declared Panama to be in a state of war. It was now late December, Christmas season, stores crowded with customers and their Christmas merchandise.

December 20, 12:00 a.m.: My family and I – our three boys were there with us, ages 14, 12, and 8 – will never forget "Operation Just Cause." The bombing, the strong military presence for weeks that followed, the terrible Friday, December 22 following the Wednesday a.m. invasion; a day of looting as people ransacked the stores, including those nearby us, and carried things up the street in front of our house. Everyone was concerned that once the stores were wiped out, looters would start breaking into homes. That night, by common consent, believers set a time to pray and call upon the Lord for His protection. I'll never forget when the prayer

time ended, at that very moment, we heard the first U.S. helicopters passing over the neighborhoods, and heard that a curfew had been instituted! We were able to sleep in peace, in spite of the uncertainty. The next day, we saw the first troops, patrolling the city. Things began to quickly calm down.

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### **Parents' Home-going**

These memories, though separated by over 25 years, have special significance: the passing of our parents, their departing this earth on their Heavenly journey. My dad died in 1981, after a year and a half struggle with pancreatic and liver cancer. He was not quite 70, and I was only 31 when he left us. We are thankful he lived longer than the doctors' had predicted, and enjoyed several months relatively pain-free. Judy's mom, Lillian Hovis, left us in 1993, at age 68. She had taken care of Judy's dad, who had lived in declining health for some time, when she was stricken with pancreatic and liver cancer in 1992. In less than a year, she was gone. That left Judy's dad, who lived for almost three years after his wife of 46 years was taken. He passed in 1996, at home. My mom suffered from Alzheimer's for more than 8 years, before the Lord took her home in 2007.

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These very selective memories, spread over a period of 30 plus years, show God's love, faithfulness, protection, and comfort. From a precious, unforgettable moment of fellowship and camaraderie, to the Holy Spirit's mighty working among believers in Cuba, to God's hand of protection during a time of uncertainty and danger, to His comfort as we said our earthly goodbyes to those we love, He was there!



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# Memories (Part 1)

Memories are indicators, reminding us where we've been, what we've experienced, and the faithfulness of God throughout our lives.

Memories are signposts, pointing us backward for remembrance and reflection so that we can then look forward to God in faith and anticipation.

Memories are not in and of themselves infallible or "stand alone." Truth, fact, and reality are all much more important. At the same time, memories are our recollection and impression of those events and realities.

Some memories seem to always be around, just under the surface, easily recalled. Others pop up out the blue, after not having been remembered or thought of for years.

It would be negligent to fail to point out that there are bad memories, awful memories, that constitute nightmares in our lives. These don't bring joy as do good, positive memories, but sometimes we can still learn from them. We can trust the Lord to heal them and to help us learn from them.

Memories can be faulty or false. My memory of Judy's nurse's cap, for example. The first time I went to see her in Missouri in 1970 after we started dating, I arrived at her house, and her dad took me with him to go pick her up. I used to tell people of seeing her come out of the doctor's office where she worked, so pretty with her nurse's cap on. She reminded me that she was not wearing a cap; I was remembering a picture of

her in her nurse's garb on a shelf at home. I had conflated the two things and thus had a faulty memory.

Memories can have great value, even if we don't remember everything. While it's great to remember one's salvation experience – and many do in great detail – it is even more important to know that today we are relying on Jesus' finished work on the cross, and are believing in and following him. It's not necessary to remember the date and all the circumstances.

God constantly reminded His people of His mighty workings on their behalf in the past and urged them to go back and recall His faithfulness. (Psalm 78 is a lengthy recall of what God had done in the life of Israel, and how the people still didn't obey and follow Him.) Psalm 77:11: "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old." (Psalm 103:2)

So, with those foundational observations, some memories "from my personal storehouse." I've selected them as representative, and for their value as teaching experiences. Over time, I hope to do a couple more of these, that cover the years of my life. I'm convinced that memories can have great value as teachers.

**1966** (I think that's the year.) "Who Am I?" Sunday morning service at my home church. I was 16. A group of young women, slightly older than me, was singing one Sunday morning, a beautiful song that was very popular during those years. As they sang "who am I that a King would bleed and die for, who am I that He would pray not my will thine for?," [1. Who Am I: Charles "Rusty Goodman" 1965] tears began to flow, and several of the girls totally lost it. In fact, they couldn't continue. The emotion spread throughout the church, as the Holy Spirit ministered to hearts. I think that some people came to the altar. Our pastor, as this went on for several minutes, realized he couldn't preach the sermon he'd prepared, but deftly and with wisdom, began to exhort and encourage the

people. A tremendous memory indeed, one of many times when “God showed up” and blessed His people.

**1968** Testimonies of enrolling college freshmen. Again, at my church. Again, a Sunday morning. This time, our pastor had asked those of us going off to college in a few weeks (it was early August) to briefly share. I – the shy, inhibited one – was first. All I can say is that I poured out my heart, after spending hours going over what I wanted to say, and a Power greater than mine took over, and my testimony (exhortation) touched hearts in a way I couldn’t have imagined. It may have been the first time in my life I had ever thought that God might somehow use me in the ministry as a preacher.

**1977** First service in Panama that Judy and I led. John 4 the Samaritan woman and the living water Jesus gives. We had five people present – the Cáceres family, father, mother, and three teenaged daughters. I was nervous. My Spanish was not all that good, since we had just finished one year of language school, and had arrived in Panama only two months earlier. We put the chairs in a circle. Judy played the piano and led the singing. That was the small beginning of a church plant in Bethania, Panama City – quite a memory, indeed!

**1982** Phillip’s epiglottitis. I was on a trip to Panama’s interior, about two hours from home. Up in Buenos Aires, there was no electricity and no running water. There was no way to keep in touch with Judy and the three boys. When I got home four days later, there was a sign on the door: “Phillip is in the hospital. Don’t worry – he’s much better. Come as soon as you can.”

I rushed over to Paitilla Hospital to find Phillip in a hospital room under an oxygen tent. Judy explained that after I left on my trip, Phill had started running a high fever, and didn’t seem to be breathing well; in fact, he was wheezing. After an entire morning of this, she grew very concerned and had a neighbor take him to the clinic for a 2:00 p.m.

appointment. (I had the car.) The clinic was full that afternoon, but the receptionist realized Phillip was very sick and moved him to the front. Dr. Vásquez looked at him and said “I don’t want to alarm you, but we need to get him in the hospital. I think he has epiglottitis.”

In a matter of minutes, the doctor had diagnosed our son with something rather rare in Panama – an infection of the epiglottis – which led to its swelling and producing thick saliva. Phillip was slowly smothering to death. The doctor immediately started two antibiotics and ordered an oxygen tent to help Phillip’s breathing. Unknown to Judy at the time, he spent that first night at the hospital, because of his concern, and to be able to monitor Phillip closely.

God was so merciful, and though I came into the picture “after the fact,” my heart is no less grateful to the Lord for sparing our son. Jehovah-Rapha, the Lord our healer.

Memories...we all have them. Let’s benefit from them.

*Precious Memories how they linger*

*How they ever flood my soul.*

*In the stillness of the midnight*

*Precious sacred scenes unfold.* [2. Precious Memories: J.B.F. Wright, 1925]

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## **Sometimes He Calms the Sea**

African-American pastor and songwriter of the past century, Charles Tindley, used a common metaphor of the time to reference the trials, tribulations, dangers, and snares of the

Christian life: "When the storms of life are raging, stand by me...when the world is tossing me like a ship upon the sea, thou who rulest wind and water, stand by me." [1. "Stand By Me" Charles A. Tindley]

Another song writer-poet expressed similar sentiments: "Jesus Savior, pilot me, over life's tempestuous sea, unknown waves before me roll, hiding rocks and treacherous shoal, wondrous sovereign of the sea, Jesus Savior, pilot me." [2. "Jesus, Savior Pilot Me" Edward Hopper]

Songwriter Scott Krippayne, echoed these thoughts in a song he wrote in 1995:

*All who sail the sea of faith  
Find out before too long  
How quickly blue skies can grow dark  
And gentle winds grow strong  
Suddenly fear is like white water  
Pounding on the soul  
Still we sail on knowing  
That our Lord is in control  
Sometimes He calms the storm  
With a whispered peace be still  
He can settle any sea  
But it doesn't mean He will  
Sometimes He holds us close  
And lets the wind and waves go wild  
Sometimes He calms the storm  
And other times He calms His child"* [3. "Sometimes He Calms the Storm" Scott Krippayne]

Traveling by boat or ship, or being out on the ocean, rivers, or lakes was a dangerous thing for many centuries, since ancient times. Storms could arise without notice, and the wind, strong waves, thunder, and lightning menaced travelers, and could capsize a ship and cause many deaths. This has been symbolic of trouble in the Christian life. Storms symbolize

illness and disease, financial disasters, broken relationships, and anything else in life that threatens us, either physically or emotionally. Can God not step in and save the day? Can he not send a miracle our way?

In Mark 4, the disciples on the Sea of Galilee found themselves caught in a sudden storm, helpless and in grave danger, while Jesus was asleep in the boat. They woke him, frightened out of their wits, and He stood, extended His hand, rebuked the wind, and said "peace, be still." Immediately the storm ended. Instantly. There was a "great calm." Jesus then rebuked his followers for their lack of faith. Sure, He can calm storms. He's God.

A few years later, Paul was traveling as a prisoner to Rome, on board a ship in the Mediterranean Sea. Suddenly, a Euroclydon, a powerful, cyclone-type wind arose, and for the next two weeks the ship was tossed and battered until all hope of survival was gone. But suddenly Paul appeared and said to all on board with him: "The God whose I am, and whom I serve, has appeared to me." He gave Paul the peace he needed, and the assurance that all would be well (Acts 27:23). But they had to ride out the storm and suffer shipwreck. Life's like that sometimes.

Yet another song repeats for us the same truth:

*Sometimes He calms the storm sometimes He calms me*

*Sometimes the storm still rages on but I feel the sweetest peace*

*It's such a joy to know that my Lord knows just what I need*

*Sometimes He calms the storm sometimes He calms me*[4. "He Calms me" sung by the McKameys]

Here are some lessons we can learn.

God is sovereign over every storm life brings our way. He is capable of doing the miraculous; healing, provision, removing obstacles, and certainly doesn't mind His child asking for

those things. He may not do what we wish He would, but He always, always, always, will be with us, and will speak peace to our heart if we call upon Him. “Therefore, we will not fear...” (Psalm 46:2) At the end of the day, He will “get us to the other side.”

Here’s the point. We all face storms. God can miraculously still them, and sometimes will, but often we will have to go through them. However, even in the storm He is with us, can speak peace to our heart. The loss of our beautiful daughter-in-law two years ago – my health challenges the past few years – standing with friends and family during severe trials. I’m so glad He is there. The song by *Casting Crowns*, “Praise You in This Storm,” states it beautifully:

*And I’ll praise you in this storm  
And I will lift my hands  
That you are who you are  
No matter where I am  
And every tear I’ve cried  
You hold in your hand  
You never left my side  
And though my heart is torn  
I will praise you in this storm*[5. Praise You in This Storm”  
Mark Hall and Bernie Herms (Casting Crowns)]

Prayer: Father, even now be with your dear children who are caught in one of life’s raging storms, whatever it might be. Please calm the storm, according to your will, or please calm them, and assure them of your love and presence. In the powerful name of Christ, Amen.

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# REO Pays Tribute: Marie Lytle

On September 18, 2007 my mother, Marie Eula Buchanan Lytle was called home to Heaven at the age of 87. We had watched Alzheimer ravage her mind and body for eight years, and it was a sweet release to see her go.

Coming up on another Mother's Day, this tribute is in memory of her, and in her honor. I owe much of the man I am today to her influence, teaching, and prayers.

I saw her kneel at the altar of the Swannanoa Free Will Baptist Church in the fall of 1961 during a powerful revival meeting that swept our church, where she wept as she repented and rededicated her life to Christ. From that day forward, she was a changed woman. We were in church every time the door was opened, and we were not permitted to miss. She prayed, she talked about the Lord to us kids, she walked with God. I saw her more than once on her knees in her room praying for her family.

I remember in January 1967 when the first Super Bowl was being played. I begged to stay home and watch it that Sunday evening, but she was adamant in her refusal. Never mind that it was the biggest game in history in the mind of a 16 year old boy. We were going to church. You didn't miss church for anything.

Much of Mother's life and special influence revolves around music. In my mind I can still see her standing at the kitchen sink and singing. You have to understand this; she was not a good singer. She never sang a special in church; didn't even sing in the choir. But her music and her heart, above all, touched the heart of God – and it touch me deeply.

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The first song I can distinctly remember Mother singing was



"You Are My Sunshine," a very popular tune in the 1950s. The first Christian song I recall was the lovely "How Beautiful Heaven Must Be." I suppose that was around 1956 or 1957.

*We read of a place that's called Heaven  
It's made for the pure and the free  
These truths in God's word we are given  
How beautiful Heaven must be.*

*How beautiful Heaven must be  
Sweet home of the happy and free  
Fair haven of rest for the weary  
How beautiful Heaven must be*

Mother loved to sing "Is Not This The Land of Beulah?" Number 27 in the old Baptist Hymnal. She would sing it with strong emotion, especially the second verse. It might have been her testimony:

*I can see far down the mountain where I wandered weary years  
Often hindered on my journey by the ghosts of doubts and fears  
Broken vows and disappointments, thickly sprinkled on my way  
But the Spirit led unerring to the land I hold today.*

I have to believe that it was, at least in part, her love for that song that birthed the same love in me; it has been a favorite my whole life, nearly 60 years now. In fact, I don't doubt for a moment that my love for music and song stems from my earliest recollections of how certain songs impacted her.

There was a time when I was about 10, and we had just moved to our new home in Swannanoa. I had been saved that summer in Vacation Bible School, and after we moved – probably around October or November, I crossed the little branch by our house, walked out to the woods, and sat down on a fallen tree. I started singing:

*He never said I'd have silver or gold  
Yet He has promised me riches untold  
He never suffered a life without care*

*Yet He relieves every burden I bear.*

*Sin stained the cross with the blood of my Lord*

*Yet He permitted it without a word*

*Why, tell me why, He redeemed you and me?*

*Love is why you and I are free.*

Life wasn't easy for Mother. She worked very hard at a local factory. My dad did not follow Christ for many years; for ten years he did not darken the door of a church, and was very bitter and angry. My parents argued frequently and there were attitudes and undercurrents in the home I never understood. Yet for the most part, we had a happy childhood.

Mother didn't drive, and so for several years until I got my driver's license, we were dependent on folks in our church for rides to church on Sundays and Wednesdays, revival meetings, and special activities. Several families, including a couple of Mom's best friends, were so good to come and pick us up, and there were four of us! Through the years, we rarely missed a service. Mother was determined that we be at God's house, hearing the Word preached and taught, and singing His praises. She loved the old hymns and she loved gospel music, and as a result, so did I.

My dad came to the Lord in 1971, and for the last decade of his life – he died in 1981 – he, too, was faithful to church.

By then, I had finished Bible College, gotten married, and began preparing for the mission field. Judy and I, along with baby Michael, said goodbye to my parents in Asheville, North Carolina as we boarded a plane to fly to Costa Rica to begin Spanish language school in August 1976. Standing there as the flight was announced, and seeing Mother's tears flow as she kept hugging Michael, Judy, and me is a powerful memory. Also powerful is the memory of my parents and sister coming to Panama to visit us, and our pride and joy in introducing them to the country that had become our home.

After my dad passed away in 1981, Mother lived for 26 more years. Church attendance, ministry (especially to nursery age kids), and caring for family remained her heartbeat. As her mind began to deteriorate in the late 1990s, followed by full-blown Alzheimer's in the early 2000s, life changed for her.

She always enjoyed music, though, up until the final couple of years. My brother would go see her in the nursing home every day, and took a CD of praise and worship music for her to hear. We gave her a Gaither Homecoming CD.

The final two years of her life, Mother was totally unresponsive. She didn't know us, she couldn't speak, and her body was twisted and drawn up as she simply lay there on the nursing home bed. We had prayed many times that the Lord would take her home, yet we didn't know it was imminent on September 15, 2007, the last time we saw her. I was alone with her, speaking softly, and just watching her, when the idea occurred to me that I would sing to her.

Undoubtedly her favorite song, at least for the last 25 years of her life, was Squire Parson's classic "Sweet Beulah Land." Now I'm not a singer at all, and my best singing is done in the shower or in the car with no one else around. But I began to sing:

*I'm kind of homesick for a country  
To which I've never been before  
No sad goodbyes will there be spoken  
And time won't matter any more.*

*Beulah land, I'm longing for you  
And some sweet day on thee I'll stand  
There my home will be eternal  
Beulah land, sweet Beulah land*

Would you believe it? My mother, totally unresponsive for two years, lying in bed like a vegetable, began to respond to the song! While I couldn't understand the words she spoke – it

was more like mumbling – it was evident it had touched her and that she was trying to sing along. That was a precious moment.

Two days later my brother called to say that she was gone.

Happy Mother's Day to my precious mother. Thank you for your godly influence.



# Grace and Glory

*For Jehovah God is a sun and a shield:*

*Jehovah will give grace and glory;*

*No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.*

Psalm 84:11

Psalm 84:11 is one of the most beautiful, majestic Psalms. Here we find these two words together, in juxtaposition that brings hope, blessing and encouragement to followers of Jesus. The Lord will give grace and glory. The context of this most precious Psalm is one of a pilgrim longing for God's house and being on a journey where he is unable to be there. But he finds God's strength sufficient for his pilgrimage (verses 5-7) and so he journeys on toward Jerusalem. The climactic part, verses 10-12, is his testimony that he would rather spend one day in God's courts than thousands elsewhere. Verse 11 is powerful: the LORD God is a sun and shield, and grants "favor and honor," a more modern way to render "grace and glory." Thus we see that there is an immediate application to the present, as he goes on to say "he does not withhold the good from those who live with integrity." (CSB)

Charles Spurgeon states:

*Who else could give either grace or glory? But God is full of grace—His very name is Love—it is His Nature to freely dispense of His goodness to others. As it is according to the nature of the sun to shine, so it is according to the Nature of God to give good things to His creatures. In Him all fullness dwells—all grace and all glory are perpetually resident in Jehovah, the Infinite. What a mercy it is that we, poor empty sinners, have to do with a God of such fullness and of such goodness! If He were shorthanded with His love, what would become of us? If He had but little graciousness, if He had but little glory, then we great sinners must certainly perish. But since the Lord is a bottomless well of love and a topless mountain of grace, we may come to Him, and come*

*freely, without any fear that either His grace or His glory will ever suffer any diminution. Note again that the text says, "Jehovah will give grace and glory." Not only has He these wondrous blessings, but He has them that He may give them freely. If He were to keep them to Himself, He would be none the richer, and when He distributes them, He is none the poorer! The Lord does not sell grace or glory, He does not put them up to auction to those who can give something in return for them. God is a great Giver and a great Forgiver. He gives grace and glory without money, without price and without any merit in the receiver. The Lord gives—there is nothing freer than a gift and there can be nothing freer than that greatest of all the gifts of God, eternal life! That expression, "eternal life," sums up these two things—grace and glory. "The Lord will give grace and glory." It is His glory to give His grace and because of His graciousness, He gives glory! [1. Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit #2502]*

Yet, "grace and glory," surely suggest our future blessing in eternity as well. "'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home" (John Newton). I thought of some songs that feature the phrase "grace and glory," some of which emphasize the here and now, while others the "sweet by and by."

"Where He Leads Me I Will Follow" – a song of commitment and trust, where the lines of the verses are repeated as "I can hear my Savior calling," "He'll go with me through the garden," "He'll go with me through the judgment," and finally "He will give me grace and glory." The refrain says "Where He leads me I will follow (three times)...He'll go with me, with me, all the way." From His initial call to the grace and glory that await, no doubt a reference to Heaven, He will truly go with me all the way. [2. Where He Leads Me: Ernest W. Blandy, 1890]

A group called "Poet Voices" sang a song about a decade or so ago called "Grace and Glory." Again, borrowing from those

beautiful words it states "His love is full of grace and glory that is why I sing."

Unmerited favor of the Savior falling from His holiness  
It is never ending grace extending from His righteousness  
To the undeserving, God is serving bountiful supply  
His great love's abounding and surrounding us from sky to sky.[3. Phil Cross, Bridge Building Music, BMI, Chris White Music, BMI]

Christian songwriter, poet, and comedian Aaron Wilburn wrote a song some years ago in which "grace and glory," while not the theme or title, still figures prominently in the message. Recently performed by a number of singing groups, it was a favorite of Aaron's mother: "That Sounds Like Home to Me," a song about Heaven, in which the refrain thrills the believer's heart by affirming "the hills will echo with the story as we sing of His grace and glory. Wow! To think that one day we'll extol His grace and glory throughout the ages.[4. C.A. Wilburn and Edwin Crook, Werner Chappel Music, Inc.]

Finally, there comes to my mind a song I heard only a couple of months ago by a trio I enjoy a great deal. Songwriter Sue C. Smith and collaborators beautiful lyrics, and Karen Peck's country soprano delivers yet another song of hope "On the Banks of the Promised Land." My soul is set to soar when I hear the refrain "Hallelujah, what a morning, when I reach for that nail-scarred hand, and I'm led by His grace and His glory, on the banks of the Promised Land." [5. Sue C. Smith, David Moffit, Jason Dyba]

My conclusions: The Psalm would indicate that grace and glory are for both now and for the future. It's grace that saves us now, that guides and guards us in this life, that leads us on this earthly pilgrimage, but it is also grace that leads us home, to again quote John Newton.

To glory – what does that mean? The goal, the end of God's



grace working in us is to transport us to glory, as some of the songs I've quoted suggest. But we might also say that the grace at work in us brings glory to Him who is worthy of it all – grace to glory. And most definitely grace accomplishes glory – His glory and our enjoyment of it and rapture in it – here on earth temporarily and imperfectly, and permanently and perfectly in Heaven.

These past days have been bittersweet. Services at church have been good, and it is thrilling to see our Hispanic group there, growing in the Lord, and becoming more involved. However, news came of the passing of two friends, both named Tim. Tim Hayes was from Illinois, very active in his church, in missions, and with the Master's Men Disaster Relief Team. I have known him since college days. A massive heart attack. Then, Tim Coats, formerly a Home Missionary in South Dakota, and in recent years a bivocational pastor there in Rapid City. He and Kathy were summer missionaries with us in 1982 in Panama when our kids were very small. Faithful men, good friends. They have now gone from grace to glory, praise the Lord.

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## **A Panamanian Perspective on Holy Week**

Since I spent nearly 30 years in Panama as a missionary, I have a perspective on Easter that I trust has taught me some valuable lessons.

First off, Holy Week in the early years (1970s-1980s) tended to be influenced by Roman Catholicism, the predominant religion in Panama. The entire week was somewhat subdued, with

less emphasis on the commercial aspects of life. Good Friday was somber and solemn; television and radio stations could only play, funeral-like music, dirges, and the like. Churches had mass to commemorate the passion. There were no sports or entertainment. (After those early years, Good Friday became more "secular," and has remained so. It is possible that some radio stations may have special solemn programming, but not the TV stations, by and large. Some of the older people, staunchly Catholic, complained, but basically the day has become a "holiday," not a "holy day.")

Strangely enough, Easter Sunday was pretty much business as usual. Though it was called "Domingo de Gloria," (Sunday of Glory), there didn't seem to be a lot of celebration of Christ's resurrection, and folks went to the beach, had picnics, visited family, etc., pretty much like any other time when they were off work. But neither the solemnity or the frivolity seemed to touch people very deeply. The solemnity didn't cause people to come to Christ for forgiveness of sin, and receive a Savior who would change their lives. The frivolity wasn't Christian joy, based on the the certainty of the Risen Lord who had conquered death.

What a difference I discovered in the evangelical church! For one thing, many churches had a special Good Friday service which featured the seven last words of Christ he uttered from the cross. I took part in many of those over the years, sometimes preaching just one of the seven words, as in a joint service, and sometimes all seven. It could make for a very long service, but focusing from a theological as well as a practical perspective was helpful and challenging.

We sang songs (in Spanish) like "There is a Fountain," and "Nothing But the Blood." We also sang songs about the passion such as "Oh Qué Amor," (Oh What Love), and "¿Sabes qué Murió Jesús?" (Do you Know that Jesus Died?) this last one sung to the tune of the 1960s pop song "Sealed With a Kiss." Beautiful, melodic songs about our Savior's death on the cross

that really touched my heart, but unknown to English-only speaking people.

Easter Sunday was always a special day in Panama. We'd sing, in Spanish of course, songs like "Low in the Grave He Lay" with volume and emotion, and hear the resurrection message delivered on that day of days.

We introduced to the church in Bethania, where we served for about 15 years, the "Sunrise Service" concept. I think some other churches already were doing it, but it was new to many of the people we'd seen come to Christ, and over time came to be one of the most popular and inspiring things we did each year. An early service, often around 5:30 or 6:00 a.m., followed by a breakfast fellowship meal, and then Sunday School, made for a glorious day in the Lord, and with His people.

I remember our first Easter in Panama, in 1978, when we met at the church on a Sunday night. It would have been March 26. Our main service was held on Sunday night at the beginning of the church plant. We sang. We prayed. I preached. At the end of the service a young man in his early 20s came forward to receive Christ. His words to me were these: "I knew there had to be more in life than what I had found, and tonight I found it in Jesus Christ." Christ arose! He lives! He is risen. He is risen indeed!