

Dr. James B. Buskirk

Together, he and his wife, Nancy, dedicated their lives to ministry.

Chapter 01 - x:xx

Introduction

Announcer: Dr. James B. Buskirk was Senior Minister at First United Methodist Church in Tulsa for twelve years beginning September 1984. Prior to his First Methodist ministry he was the founding dean of the School of Theology at Oral Roberts University. Dr. Buskirk is the originator of two local church programs in creative ministry called “Motivation for Ministry” and “Affirmation Evangelism.”

Dr. Buskirk served over thirty years as a pastor. He served as the chair-person of the Oklahoma Conference Board of Evangelism for eight years. For four years he was on the Conference Board of Education and has served many other boards and agencies.

Dr. Buskirk’s experiences as a husband, father, pastor, evangelist, professor, dean of a seminary, and administrator all have contributed to his effectiveness in ministry.

And now listen to Dr. Buskirk along with his wife Nancy talk about their lives in ministry on VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 8:55

Daddy Called to Preach

John Erling: My name is John Erling. Today’s date is December 19, 2013. Dr. Buskirk, would you state your full name, your age, and your date of birth?

Jim Buskirk: James Bradford Buskirk. I’m eighty years old. I was born September 6, 1933. I was actually born on Chiwapa Bottom, near Shannon, Mississippi.

JE: What’s that, Chiwapa Bottom?

JB: C-h-i-w-a-p-a, that was a low area. My grandfather came down from Indiana. He bought land very cheaply back then, and cut the big timber off of it, and trimmed the limbs off of

it, put it on a flatcar and shipped it back to Indiana to Taylor Pearson's lumber company. And his brother-in-law got the lumber in Indiana.

He stayed in Mississippi because he came to own so much land on Chiwapa Bottom. I was born, actually, on my grandfather's place near Tupelo, Mississippi, closer to Shannon, Mississippi.

JE: What was his name, your grandfather's name?

JB: My grandfather's name was Emerson Buskirk.

JE: And then your grandmother's name?

JB: Lydia Leatherman.

JE: We are recording this interview here in the recording facilities here of voicesofoklahoma.com.

Your mother's name, maiden name, and where she grew up.

JB: My mother's name was Hermian Buskirk. She was Hermian Pope, the granddaughter of a country doctor. Her mother was a tomboy and liked to drive her father during emergency cases in the night, through the night, with three lanterns on the buggy so everybody knew they were coming.

So, obviously, my grandmother wanted to call me to be a doctor, but I didn't respond to that very well. She was a Crump. Dr. Crump was in Smithville, Mississippi.

The Buskirks was a very big family. There were five boys and five girls. My dad was the middle of the five sons. They farmed and Daddy was born in 1903. Back then the guys quit school in the ninth grade in order to work on the farm. They were the labor force. And that complicated things later when my dad went in the ministry.

He was called at eighteen years of age, standing over his mother's grave. He delayed that. He believed in that Scripture said that Jesus gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers for the equipping of the saints, the laity, for their ministry. He tried to do his ministry as a lay person. He was Superintendent of the Sunday school of the United Methodist Church. He taught a Sunday school class, he was on the board, he was a steward and had charge of six families to take care of them. He was Chair of the Board at one time.

And then one day, he was standing looking at his field and a wonderful crop. It was a Saturday afternoon and my daddy could never be convinced that God didn't speak to him audibly. Because Daddy thanked him for the crop. He said, "But why waste time?"

"Waste time? Look at that crop, God," he said.

He said, "But you're wasting time because there are men and women, boys and girls that need to hear about Jesus. And I want you to be that voice."

That bothered my dad so much he just stopped going to church. He didn't go to church for three years.

My mom said she thought he was losing his mind. But, fortunately, she stayed with him and one afternoon, Sunday afternoon, about six o'clock, the sun was going down,

Grover Meadows, a man that Daddy played baseball with who now was a minister, drove up in our yard, and said, "Bob, I want you and the family to go to church with me."

And Daddy said, "I'm not going."

He said, "Well, I came over here to start the revival at Pleasant Grove and your pastor, Brother Sudam, has gone over to preach in my church tonight. And on the way over here I got you on my mind. I'd learned about you just stop going to church and I think I know what's wrong with you. That happened to me once. My sermon tonight was given to me by God on the way over here. And it's for you. No point in my going to church if you don't go to church."

Well, Daddy argued with him until church time, and then we got in his car with him and went to church. Daddy parked his car and we walked in the church. I went in with Mother and Eunice and Dorothy, my younger and older sisters, and we went out with Brother Meadows right near the front. And Daddy sat on the back pew.

And Brother Meadows preached that night on the call to preach. When the sermon ended and he gave the invitation, my dad came down the center aisle, crying aloud. I'd never heard my daddy cry. That was a very moving, almost frightening experience for me. He talked to Brother Meadows, and Brother Meadows said, "No, Bob, you tell them."

Daddy turned and said, "I'm called to preach."

And Mother said, "Aaah!"

And I was standing by her and started crying. I thought that was something terrible.

Incidentally, Mother did too. She had finished high school but knew that Dad had not.

And Brother Meadows said, "Hermian, what do you think about that?"

And she said, "Well, if God's really called Bob, I'll go with him and I'll do the best that I can."

Dad went to see the Bishop and the Bishop said, "You can't be a Methodist minister, you don't have an education."

Daddy said, "Couldn't I go to school in the town where I preach?"

He said, "Well, that'd be weird." He said, "No, I don't think so."

So he came back home and called Brother Meadows and said, "The Bishop said I couldn't preach."

Brother Meadows said, "You can preach in my church. I got a revival starting this week. You come on over."

Well, the news got out that Bob Buskirk was preaching. Daddy played baseball with the guys all through that county and the adjacent one. And the men poured out and filled the church. And over fifty men made commitments that week.

Brother Meadows called the Bishop and told him about it. And about six months later he called Dad and said, "I have a minister who is hauling pulpwood to supplement

his salary and a tree fell across his body and crushed his pelvis. I need you to fill in for the next nine months and then I'll replace you when Annual Conference appointment time comes around."

We moved to Randolph, Mississippi, I was in the first grade then. Daddy preached for that nine months. The people went in arms to the county seat to tell the Bishop they'd better not move their preacher.

We stayed there for two years and then moved to a place called Algoma. And I was in the third grade there. I was very impressed with our poverty.

I remember that when I was in the fifth grade our custodian died at our little elementary school. And I went to the superintendent and asked him if I could be the custodian. There were just seven rooms and on Saturday I cleaned the Assembly Room.

He called Mom and said, "Brad wants to be the custodian. You think he could do that?" Mom said, "Well, if he can't, I'll help him."

So I swept floors in the afternoon after school and built fires in old potbelly, iron stoves and poured a little kerosene in on the kindling and the coal that I'd put in there, so that it'd be ready to go the next morning. Washed the blackboards. That was my first job.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). Let me just pause for names here because you referred to Brad and you should point out that that's the way you were known, as Brad.

JB: Yes.

JE: When did you become Jim or James?

JB: I'm referring to myself as Brad because my middle name is Bradford. I was named after my mother's father, so I grew up Brad. And then when I went to college, we had a very astute English literature teacher and she insisted on using our full names, James Bradford Buskirk. And she used to call me James, and I liked that. I would object and the students picked up on that and started calling me, "James," and then, "Jimmy." And when I met Nancy, my wife, I was being called Jimmy, so Jimmy stuck.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). How old were you when your father went down the aisle there and felt that he was called?

JB: I was between three and four years old. I was talking about that one time and my mom and dad said, "You can't remember that."

And I said, "Yes, because you preached there at your church the next Sunday night and your sermon was on man's duty to God."

They turned pale and said, "Well, I guess you do remember it."

This was a very dramatic time in our lives.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative). So establish again, your father's name was?

JB: Bob Buskirk.

JE: And then your mother's name?

JB: Was Hermian Pope.

JE: Tell us about your mother's personality.

JB: Mother was quiet, very humble, preciously sweet person. She said, "I'd rather have my feelings hurt than to hurt anybody's feelings." She was a real good partner for Dad because Dad was outspoken, he was aggressive, but the balance together made a good parsonage family.

JE: Traits that you think you took from either one of them or both of them?

JB: I think I have some of Mother's traits in my thought processes and in my private life. I have more of Dad's characteristics. I denied that until I was in my doctoral program and in a clinical pastoral education course. I was forced to share my story. And the guy kept pushing me about Dad and I kind of lost it, and then apologized.

He said, "Don't apologize. If you've got an anger and some push, boy, you can be a preacher."

Chapter 03 - 4:00

Boy Scouts

John Erling: Now let me point out here that sitting at our table is your wife. Her name is Nancy.

Nancy, your full name?

Nancy Buskirk: Nancy Merritt from Calhoun City, Mississippi.

JE: And you've lived here in Oklahoma, how long now?

NB: Forty years.

JE: And you haven't lost your southern accent, have you?

NB: Yes, and I've tried for that.

JE: Well, don't, it's great.

NB: Thank you.

JE: It's great. In elementary school, junior high school, high school—

Jim Buskirk: Um-hmm (questioning sound)?

JE: When did you realize that you enjoyed public speaking?

JB: I joined the Scouts when I was thirteen years of age. I was a little boy back then and some of us guys, I'm almost ashamed to tell you, we'd put our bicycles on the edge of the street and pour ketchup around them and lie down on the edge of the curb. Cars would come along and squeal the tires and the women would scream. They'd jump out of the car.

And the assistant Scout master drove by, circled the block and came back. I was the dummy who was lying on the side. So when the others ran toward the schoolhouse that

was surrounded with trees that gave us cover, he got pretty close to me, jumped out of his car, he was just out of the Air Force and he outran me. He said, "Buskirk, you might as well stop and talk to me. I know you. I know your preacher daddy and I think I'm going to have to tell him about what you were doing tonight unless you decide to be a Scout."

I said, "I've wanted to a Scout all my life." So I became a Scout.

And Jimmy Ellis didn't like the mother-side of me. When I was timid he would encourage me. I spoke rapidly and once he told me, "We're going to wait until you get through, just slow down, Brad." And I did.

The troop grew to over 105 people, others just in the process of joining, so they divided it. For some reason, they divided right on down the middle, the younger part and the older part. They asked Jimmy Ellis, my assistant Scout master, if he'd be the Scout master for the younger part. He came to me and said, "Brad, I told them I'd do it if you'll be the senior patrol leader, the leader of the Scout troop."

I said, "I can't do that. I kind of stutter and I'm timid."

He said, "Yes you can."

I decided I would. I did things then that I would later do in ministry. I had to plan the meetings. I had to speak without being embarrassed. I had to supervise the patrol leaders, who each had a fourth of the troop under them. I would go to civic clubs and speak and tell Scout stories and say, "Wouldn't you like to contribute to something that's doing that for boys?"

So I learned how to speak and raise money. Everything I've ever done in ministry, I did initially in Scouting. And that amazes me now as I look back.

JE: Yeah. Were you a timid child?

JB: I was timid until I was probably eleven or twelve.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: Then that started passing. And we moved a lot. It didn't serve me well with the boys and the bullies in the classes. I took care of a few of them. And Daddy got me out of one of those scraps.

The principal caught us before Daddy got away and he took us in and said, "I never had a father and his son fighting on campus. I don't know what I'm going to do with you."

Well, three other boys, who really started the fight, they'd done something they shouldn't have done to try to embarrass me. I explained what they had done and he paddled them. Back then they did that. Then he looked at me and said, "I don't know what I'm going to do with a father and his son fighting on campus."

JE: And your father was fighting?

JB: Daddy saw the fight and came in and pulled those three guys off of me, and said, "You can take care of him but you'll have to do it one at a time and I'm going to be here."

Well, they were timid and they froze, and I started to fight again. Then they plastered me and all three of them was really giving me a tough time. And Daddy pulled them off me. So he was there when the principal came, stopped the fight again. I was sure glad to see that principal.

When he asked me, "What are we going to do with a father and son fighting on campus?" I looked at Daddy and said, "He's not big enough to whip us, is he?" I had an unusual childhood.

JE: Yeah.

JB: You'd never suspect I was going to be a preacher.

Chapter 04 - 2:22

December 7, 1941

John Erling: December 7, 1941, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, that was on a Sunday.

Jim Buskirk: December 7, 1941, born in '33, I was eight or nine years old.

JE: How did you hear about it?

JB: I was converted as a child, nine years of age, and one of Daddy's churches, it was Palestine [pronounced Palasteen] not Palestine. I loved to go to that church and I'd gone with my daddy to church that day. And we went to the Todd's house. Miss Todd was my second grade teacher, and her sister-in-law next door, Miss Virginia, was a woman who stirred God in me before that time. She lived next door to the Todds. We visited together and Miss Virginia had been there and Edna Todd had been there.

After lunch, we went out in the backyard. Daddy liked to walk around when things happened. We heard about that. Daddy prayed in the house, went around and walked around a while. We came back and started to get in the car, and I think it was Miss Todd, Miss Edna Todd, came out and said, "Let me make a picture of you and your daddy." And she made it. I don't know if she was thinking that was a historic day, but it certainly was.

JE: As a child, did that have an impact on you, Pearl Harbor?

JB: I remember that the whole country had fear. We didn't know that we could win. And that was communicated to the children somehow. People said in those days that if they'd kept coming it wouldn't have been the same. They were really given a struggle. But they hit Pearl Harbor and then went home.

We had a train to come into Algoma, where I was converted, and a Jones boy came back, he'd been in prison. He was just skin and bones.

I had a cousin who came back with, who was shell-shocked. Never did get over it. Loud noise, he'd hit the floor. So everywhere you looked, you could see the war.

I didn't understand then, you know, food stamps and gasoline stamps. Daddy would take his bath in a galvanized tub in the kitchen and leave early, in case he ran out of gas he could walk and get to the church where he was going to preach. If somebody gave him five dollars he'd put the gas in, come back home, wait a while, and then go preach. It was hard to get tires.

That war made an impression and it's still with me now. I feel somewhat concerned about our nation, like I did then as a child. But as a Christian and lifelong minister, I don't deal with it in the same way.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 05 - 1:40

Conversion

Jim Buskirk: I later was to come to know a person who was in one of those submarines there, who lived through that. In fact, in the revival, when I was converted, a Patterson boy was home on furlough. The revival service was over and wagons and cars were leaving to go home and half the people were gone. When Patterson came by, my dad looked at him and said, "Fred, I'd hoped you'd come down. You're going back to war. I wish you'd become a Christian."

He started crying, and said, "How can I do that?"

Daddy came out with that big, booming voice and said, "Come on back, folks. We've got one to baptize." And Daddy said, "Other people should have accepted Christ tonight. Let's sing "Just As I Am" again."

And on the last verse and the last phrase, I started down, and then froze. That was a bad looking church, physically speaking, and I wanted to join the church next to our house, which was nice. And halfway down there I knelt on the aisle on the side, they had old gas lamps and not much light.

And my mother came to me and said, "What's the matter?"

I said, "I want to accept Christ but I don't want to join this church."

She said, "Let's pray together." And Mother led me to Christ. On the way home, she said, "Bob, Brad's got something to share with you."

I shared with Daddy, and he said, "Well, Grover Meadows," he's the guy that hustled Daddy off to church, "is coming next week to preach at Algoma. You want to join there, you can join then."

And on the first night he gave the invitation, I went down. And Daddy picked me up over the kneeling rail, in his arms, and just stood there like I was his treasure. I overcame fear that night in a very special way. I knew I belonged to the Lord and whatever happened would be okay.

Chapter 06 - 5:35**Called to Preach**

John Erling: Were you involved in speaking activities in high school?

Jim Buskirk: Not much. I took voice lessons my senior year. The voice teacher was a member of Daddy's church and talked me into it. That helped me to articulate later and so on.

JE: Singing lessons.

JB: Singing lessons?

JE: Yeah.

JB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And were you a singer? Are you a vocalist?

JB: Then we had a senior recital and I did some singing then, did some singing in college. Periodically when I preach, hymns come to mind and I may sing a phrase of the hymn and so on. High school, I really enjoyed playing football and baseball and tennis, but I was best at basketball. I was center and that gave me the opportunity for more shots, so I was top scorer.

JE: Um-hmm (agreement).

JB: And enjoy watching my grandsons play basketball now.

JE: Sure. You graduated from high school what year?

JB: I graduated from high school in 1951, in a little old town in the Delta called Arcola, Mississippi. About twenty miles from Greenville, Mississippi.

JE: So then, immediately on to college?

JB: On to Millsaps. I didn't want to be a minister, ministers were poor. I worked hard jobs all the time I was growing up. Drove tractors, cut wood, had truck patches and I had a trailer and peddled groceries to towns twenty and thirty miles around. I thought I wanted to be a doctor but I took a chemistry class and that settled that.

Mother thought I ought to be a teacher because she saw me teaching Scouts. I took philosophy, I wanted to know what I thought and why I thought it. I took a religious course, a Bible course, I didn't like that, it was too liberal there. And I found myself beyond my timidity and asking questions in class so I really could debate with the professors. And I really kind of backed myself into the ministry. That call started coming very strongly.

I love philosophy, but I didn't realize that my philosophy teacher was a Methodist pastor who taught philosophy. He asked me to write my credo, everybody in class had to write it. I said, "I don't know what you're talking about. What's a credo?"

"What you believe."

I said, "I don't know what I believe."

He said, "Well, take 'I am that I am' and write a one-page thesis on that."

I started dealing with that, I am that I am, form of the verb to be, that's part of is-ness. Oh, that's why God's Creator, God is is-ness and he just relaxed and created universe. What kind of personality is that is-ness have?

I asked my teacher, he said, "Well, you see that in Jesus."

It just kind of evolved and one morning I woke up before daylight. I was struggling to put on my trousers, kept my pajama shirt on, went up to Christian Center building on accord it had a chapel in it. Went in to the chapel and said, "God, you and I used to be friends. I'd like to be your friend again but I'm afraid to get close to you because I'm afraid of what you'll ask me to do." And I said, "God, I'll farm," and that was like going to hell, as far as I was concerned. Be a shame to farm all your life and go to hell too, you know? I thought maybe I'd be a doctor, but I said, "God, I've taken chemistry and I hate that."

Sun Oil Company is in Mississippi, and I took theology and like to flunked that. I don't know what I was supposed to do. And finally I just said, "Lord, if you and I could be friends again I'll do anything you want me to do. I'll even preach." And I'll tell you, I've never been filled with such joy. I laughed and I cried. I jumped up, ran out of the Christian Center building and back to the dormitory and grabbed my friend by the collar of his pajamas, jerked him out of bed, and said, "Wake up, Watson, I'm going to be a preacher."

He said, "Big deal, go back to sleep, it's dark outside."

So I became a preacher and I wanted to preach. I just was hungered to preach. I'd say to my friends who had churches with student pastors, "Have you got a paper to write? I'd like to preach for you this weekend if you do." That word got around and I preached in a half dozen places.

And then a superintendent I didn't know, called me and said, "I want you to come up to Derma, Mississippi, in Calhoun County, and preach this Sunday. Their preacher has five churches and he's not feeling well. He's getting a little older, and I'd like you to preach for them."

I was nineteen when that happened. So I went up there and preached and went back and about three years later the diocese called me and said, "Those people in Derma said they wanted that boy that came up here and preached to come be their pastor. What do you say?"

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). And you're still in school?

JB: Yeah, I'm second semester freshman.

JE: Is your father listening to you preach?

JB: He did. I went home at Christmas to tell him about it. We sat at the supper table. I choked on my food and my sister wanted to go to the ballgame and she was patting her foot. I said, "Before I go I've got to tell you something. I'm going to be a preacher."

My mom said, "Oh no, Son!" She knew what that was like at little country churches.

My dad said, "Thank God, Son, you finally gave in."

JE: Wow. So he was praying for that.

JB: Yes.

JE: He wanted that to happen.

JB: He asked me about that in my senior year if I'd ever thought about preaching. I said, "Daddy, I'm not stupid. I'm a senior. You know I've thought about it but it's the last thing I'd ever do."

JE: In high school in your senior year, right?

JB: In high school, my senior year.

JE: So then, did he hear you preach?

JB: Oh yeah. I preached for him in his churches.

JE: Oh, did he—

JB: He preached for me in my churches.

JE: Did he critique you? Did he give you direction?

JB: Not much. We preached very differently. Daddy would take his Bible and study a Scripture and rock in his rocking chair for thirty minutes and he'd go preach. He might preach what he prepared on the front porch in the rocking chair and might not.

I prepared my sermons and did them differently and memorized and sequenced the thoughts. So it was very different. I don't preach like my father, and my son, Chris, doesn't preach like I preach.

By the way, Chris is the best of all the three preachers. You know, he's a new model and has to be better than the old ones to sell.

JE: Right.

Chapter 07 - 4:18

Jim Meets Nancy

John Erling: It was as you were attending college that you met Nancy?

Jim Buskirk: Yes. I preached at Derma, and there were five churches on that charge. They were in three counties. I really had a circuit. I was a circuit rider. And the smallest church was Mount Nebo, a little, bitty church with nine Methodists. And it was a big community cemetery and everybody got buried there, Baptists, who'd a thought it, United Methodist. Nancy's grandparents were buried in that cemetery.

We started to have revival and the lady who played the piano couldn't play very well. And she said, "I can't play for a week but I know a young Baptist girl who really plays well. Let's ask her."

So we asked this young Baptist girl. That first night she was late because of BTU and I got on the pulpit and I'd read my Scriptures and said, "Let us pray." And about that time the cutest little, dark-eyed, black-headed girl stepped in the back door. We have a hymn that says, "Prayer is your sincere desire," and I don't know what I prayed in front of the people. But my prayer was, "Lord, don't let her get away." That's how I met Nancy.

The next year she played the piano and Dad preached a revival, and I took her home one night. Drove up in front of her grandmother's house. It was a curved driveway and the way I went in was kind of uphill, and then as the car went out it went downhill. I stopped the car, and I said, "Nancy."

She started to get out and she turned around, and I kissed her, by surprise. I expected to get slapped, but instead, while I was kissing her I pushed down on the clutch in the car inadvertently, and the car started rolling. And the world started spinning for me. I said, "Oh Lord, this is the one."

But when we finished, she said, "Oh, Jimmy," rather than slapping me. And I let my foot out on the clutch and that old car said, "Chug, chug, chug." And she said, "Stop, Jimmy."

We continued to date and three years later, after I'd finished college, she became my bride.

JE: Okay, Nancy, I've got to go to you now as a witness to this. Were you as taken with him as he obviously was with you, from the get-go?

NB: I'm afraid I was. He was that startling young preacher that came to town, spoke well, moved the congregation. And I learned to appreciate him before I started dating him.

JE: Right.

NB: And then when we started dating I knew then—

JE: Yeah.

NB: . . . that if I stayed with him what would happen.

JE: So you were raised a Baptist?

NB: I was a Baptist, very involved in the Baptist church. In the community, *the* church was the Baptist church. Jim preached in the afternoons. My family wanted to support the church because it was the cemetery. He just preached once a month, but the rest of the time we were in the big Baptist church. I grew up a Baptist, all of my ancestors have been Baptist. I had to study the Methodist church to understand it.

JE: Well, I was going to say, was that a big leap for you—

NB: Uh-huh (affirmative).

JE: . . . to become a Methodist?

NB: Yes it was. Because I'd always thought that the Baptist church was *the* church—

JE: Sure.

NB: . . . when we went to seminary, I went to college while Jimmy was in seminary, I had a professor who taught Methodist Discipline. He's a wonderful Bishop, and he would talk about the Methodist church and the beliefs of the Methodist church. And I fell in love with the Methodist church.

JE: Okay.

NB: After Jim and I married.

JE: Okay.

NB: Through that Bishop.

JE: But it took the Bishop to get you there?

NB: It did.

JE: It didn't take him, did it?

NB: No. And even from the Bishop.

JE: Jim, where did you and Nancy live and minister in your early years together?

JB: Right after we married we ministered in Pittsboro, Mississippi. I had six churches on that charge. Stayed there one year, intentionally, because we wanted to go on to seminary. So we went to Emory University, Candler School of Theology. And as Nancy was saying, she went to the university and I went to the seminary.

We had a church thirty miles out from Atlanta. That church was a wonderful place. There was a Dr. Hinton, who had been a surgeon in John Hopkins Hospital and came back there at fifty-three, retired, married, had children. They built that church in honor of his father. And it was called the Hinton Memorial Methodist Church. And that doctor became like a sage in our lives.

We had a carpool. Other ministers would ride out with us, so Nancy had to sit in the car with four other ministerial students. We were arguing theology and sometimes she would have the better argument of the whole.

NB: I learned more theology in that car than I did going to church.

JE: Right.

NB: But they argued.

Chapter 08 - 4:25

Racial Discord

John Erling: Where did the two of you serve then, in Mississippi?

Jim Buskirk: We served in Pittsboro, and then later after we finished seminary, we came back to Mississippi, and we were appointed to Coldwater, Mississippi. And we were there for three years. That was an unusual time.

James Meredith entered Ole Miss, and Mississippi got into an uproar over this black man who had entered Ole Miss. And our church was upset about it as well. The men came to me and said, “The church is growing, everything’s going well, don’t talk about that.”

But Nancy was teaching school there to help to pay our school debts. A young Baptist boy who was going into the ministry, said a very angry thing about Meredith and we realized that their hatred was getting in the young people. And I announced that on a Sunday night I was going to preach on the high cost of hate—it was contagious. And I did.

The church got upset. About sixteen men met on the street and were coming to straighten me out. God had a sense of humor. He sent one of their wives by there and she spoke to her husband, John, and told him she needed something in the store in front of which they were. And went in, said, “I don’t need anything. What’s going on?”

He said, “We’re going to go straighten that preacher out.”

She said, “Well, if you killed him you wouldn’t change his mind. If you don’t know that you’re not listening tonight. And I know you’ll do what you’re led to do. But I’m praying that you’ll follow me home. The man I married wouldn’t have done this.”

So he went out and said, “Men, I can’t go with you.”

They went to another place and talked and an alcoholic with whom I was lifting weights and trying to win to Christ heard them there, quieted that discussion. Came and told me their names. And I went around to see them individually.

And individually, as we talked, they recanted and came back to church the next Sunday.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful noise). Those men, do you think they were really intent on inflicting bodily harm on you?

JB: Yes. I talked to them the next day and they were each still angry.

JE: Because your message, a little bit about it that angered them?

JB: I preached a Christian message and I talked about you couldn’t love God and hate your neighbor.

JE: Okay.

JB: And I told them that there was a young man in town who was thinking about going in the ministry who was filled with anger. He was not in our church but Nancy knew him in the school where she was a librarian. I said, “If it’s happening to them, it’s happening in your young people. And I feel like, under God, I have to speak to you about this in love. I’m your pastor and I’m responsible.”

So I did. And as much as I was responsible, accordingly, they were angry. I think they would have come.

JE: Were you fearing backlash so that when you walked into the pulpit, you know, “Well here goes, and I can expect anything”? Or did you not expect anything?

JB: Well, I had a bit of a trembling spirit, but the Lord calmed that. And after the service was over, Nancy and I just drove around in town. Had perfect peace.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: We didn't know anything about the mob until the next morning when the guy came and told us that he spoke to them at the second place they went. We stayed and didn't have to leave Mississippi, like twenty-six of our best friends did, with whom we were in seminary, to go to other states. It was really a treacherous time.

And then we moved to Charleston. Charleston was a town in the Delta. I'd driven for a politician, he was running for Highway Commissioner. And sometimes when his voice got hoarse I'd made his speeches for him. And I had actually spoken on the courthouse square in Charleston when I was nineteen years old.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: Was sent there as a pastor. And both our children were born there. Chris was born in '64, and Angela in '66. That was a very special place. They had a new parsonage for us. Loved that place. It was in the Delta and problems galore in that church.

While we were there, something that broke our hearts happened. The President was killed.

JE: President John Kennedy.

JB: President John Kennedy was assassinated. We were in New Orleans at the time and heard about it when we were eating in Three Sisters, and just cried. We just couldn't believe it.

We had a lay witness mission to come to that church that absolutely turned it around. I mean, about thirty couples came, lived with us in our house, from Friday night through Sunday morning, tell their story and tell their story and tell their story. That church was just turned right side up. People stood in the hall in line to come in and tell me how they, church members, had really found the Lord. It was an amazing place.

JE: Was there a connection to the assassination of the President to this?

JB: We wept together about that and that brought us close enough.

Chapter 09 - 4:20

Black Panthers

John Erling: After Charleston, then where did you go?

Jim Buskirk: We were in Charleston five years. Went to Lexington for two years. I think that was a mistake. We were appointed back then. The Bishop was convinced by one of the DS's and district superintendents whom had districts and they were part of the

appointment system that we should go to Lexington. The race issue was still strong and Holmes County was 86 percent black. A man in the church was trying to get all the churches in that county, twenty-five of them, to pull out of the Methodist church. And he was a state legislator.

I preached to him from the pulpit and he would hang onto the pews with white knuckles when I'd give an invitation. So I called him and said, "Ed, I'd like to talk to you. Could I come to your house?"

He said, "I'm going to the plantation and I'll come by your office."

He came in, and I said, "Brother, let me be your brother. Forget that I'm your preacher. What's going on with you?"

He just broke into tears. Confessed the life he was living. We got down on our knees on a hardwood floor and I was just moved by his prayer. That night he went to a cocktail party and walked around with a cocktail in his hand, bragging about he'd been reconverted that afternoon.

And his son said, "Why do you need that cocktail?"

And he said, "Why do you need one?"

He said, "We both need to be converted." That was their feeling about drinking cocktails.

But that kind of climaxed when a tragedy happened and Martin Luther King was killed while we were there. In Memphis, just eighty-five miles away. Buildings were burned down in Lexington, businesses went broke, they just wouldn't trade there. The blacks decided they wouldn't, they boycotted the square. One of my men lost his business and had a heart attack and died.

I went to Ed Jr., and I said, "Ed, I have a friend coming to Jackson and he knows the theology of racial problems." It was Ralph Wilkerson from New York. I didn't tell him who it was. "I wish we could get the two Black Panthers who are leading part of this problem here, to Jackson."

He went to the Black Panthers and said to them, "I'm going Friday night, I'd like you to go with me."

They were afraid that it was going to be a kind of white man's party and said, "We'll tell you Friday." On Friday afternoon they saw him go in the courthouse. They stepped out from behind cedar bushes and talked to him and said, "We'll go but we're not going to take anybody else with us. And we're leaving right now."

So I got there and my wife, "Where are we going?" He called Marty and said, "We're going to Jackson."

Went to Jackson and heard Dave Wilkerson preach. Ed Jr. said, "They were the only two black men in the stadium." And he said, "When Wilkerson gave the invitation they were the first ones up to go."

And I got up. I told you I'd never go to an altar again, but I did, I went with them. And we knelt at the altar. Scads of people came. Ed and the black men were going home that night and Ed said, "You know, this was a special experience tonight. It ought not to end tonight."

And they said, "Well, we don't know. We're Black Panthers."

He said, "I know that. I belong to a family that had a lot to do with the KKK. But this is too good to waste. What are we going to do about it?" And Ed said, "Why don't we have a Bible study."

So they did. It turned out thirty or forty men in town came. Then they decided to build a youth center, near the country club, of all places. That really didn't make the people unhappy or the country club. But near the country club, a youth center where all the kids in high school, black and white, could come for recreation. And God literally resurrected and revived that town.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

NB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And you were there for that?

JB: We were there for the first part of it.

NB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: We left from there and went back to school to get our doctorate.

JE: When you were a child, were you around blacks?

JB: Oh yes.

JE: You played with black children?

JB: Oh yes.

JE: So, from the get-go it was not an issue for you?

JB: No.

JE: Black or white, and certainly not for your parents either.

JB: And for most of Mississippians that way, they counted the people who were with them on their farms and plantations almost part of the family. Sometimes they used names like Uncle So-and-so. And later that became a derogative term.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: But, you know, the majority of people in Mississippi loved the blacks. When they started coming to school with us that was explosive. I got in trouble in Lexington because I went to see a black minister who had an accident at a sawmill. His leg was cut off between his knee and his ankle. I went to see them and the church told me not to go back to see him. I said, "He's my brother, I'll do what God asked me to do. Thank you."

So, all those kind of things happened.

JE: Yeah.

Chapter 10 - 11:00**Loss of Eyesight**

John Erling: What was happening in you and around you in this period?

Jim Buskirk: In the Coldwater pastorate and the Charleston pastorate and the Lexington pastorate, the most threatening thing in my life was happening to me. I was going blind. I developed Chorioretinitis in my left eye.

JE: Let's go back to when you first begin to realize your eyesight was failing you.

JB: I was at Coldwater at the time. Coldwater was the first of these three churches. I was reading one day and had a blind spot in my left eye and I couldn't get it to go away. I preached with that blind spot, it got larger and larger and I told Tom about it. Dr. Tom Shipman. He was a prosthodontist and a dentist.

Tom said, "You've got to come see you a specialist." So he got me into the Baptist Hospital in Memphis. He taught there in the dental part of the University of Tennessee. And I saw an eye doctor, wonderful guy, Dr. McKinney.

He looked in my eye, in fact, I read the chart. He said, "Hmm."

I said, "What's the matter?"

He said, "You've got Chorioretinitis in the left eye."

I said, "What does that mean?"

He said, "It means if your case goes as they usually do, you'll be blind in six months in that left eye."

I said, "My goodness. What about my right eye?"

He said, "Almost never transfers over. Don't worry about that."

Well, those doctors discovered that I had a poison in the blood and they gave me Deripam and sulfur for that. That's important because medicine had a part in the healing of my eyes.

I moved on to Charleston then, and I was studying in my study and a blind spot came up in my right eye. I just like to died. Called the doctor in Memphis, Dr. McKinney. He said, "Everybody always thinks that tone up. Let me tell you it's okay. I've got good news for you."

I went up there and he looked in my eyes and finally said, "Huh."

And I felt condemned when I heard that grunt, you know. And I said, "What's the matter?"

He said, "You've got it in both eyes."

I said, "Does that mean I'll be blind in six months?"

He said, "Well, you could be, but maybe not." He said, "God works with me in medicine. I give the medicine, God does the healing."

So I came back to Charleston. I preached as best I could. I'd read for about fifteen minutes and I just couldn't read anymore. My eyes would pool, trying to focus. I'd get in the pulpit with half a sermon, Nancy'd read my text for me and I'd memorize it. Pretend I was reading it. I didn't want the church to know. I'd get in the pulpit with a third of a sermon or a piece of a sermon and so on. And I learned God was a better preacher than I was.

And it was amazing, this was after the lay witness mission, and it seemed like almost every Sunday a member of the church came to the altar in invitation. Something was happening in Charleston, God was there. It was amazing.

A woman in the church was really weird. She was Miss Virginia Dempsy. She prayed for people and it was really weird until, you know, I met this preacher. I mean, they just got healed.

I had a mother who went over a railroad in a convertible with her little boy in the car. It was an old car and the hood came up and slapped the top of that canvass and it hit his head and he had brain damage.

Virginia went out to the clinic. Doctors and nurses couldn't touch him without his screaming and Virginia could pick him up and rub his back and walk down the hall with him. Put him back in the bed and he'd be quiet for a while. She said, "That boy's going to walk."

He not only walked, before he finished high school he was a quarterback on the football team.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: People would have cancer, she'd pray for them and they'd just get well.

JE: Her name again was?

JB: Virginia Dempsy. She was a United Methodist woman. She had all these old biddies around her. She actually came to Ardmore, Oklahoma, where Geneva Parkhurst, who was in First Methodist, and Anna White, who came from Florida, and Agnes Sanford from California would meet in Ardmore and they'd have camps furthest out, out there. I thought they were too far out, you know.

And that weird woman came to my office one day and just busted in, and said, "What's the matter with you?"

I didn't know if I wanted her to know. She'd tell the world and I didn't want the world to know I was going blind. I was kind of keeping that a secret, and I said, "I got a cold."

And then she really surprised me. She said, "Oh hell, I mean, what's really the matter with you? God wouldn't wake me up at night for two or three hours praying for you because you had a cold. Now tell me what's the matter with you?"

And I thought, "I'll just drop it on her." I said, "I got Chorioretinitis on both eyes. I'll be blind in six months, probably."

She said, "That's not going to happen, we're going to pray." She just took charge, I mean, at least, she was in my office, she should have said, "Could we pray?" What do you do with lay people that don't know anything about protocol? But she just took over. I won't forever forget her prayer. She said, "Lord, we know you always hear your own. Sometimes here and sometimes in the resurrection."

I thought, "That's not fair. I've never heard that."

"Lord, we're not telling you what to do or when to do it, that's your program and that's your calendar. Just help Brother Jimmy, as hardheaded as he is, to be able to believe that you are already healing, that it's in process. Hallelujah," she said. "It's happening." And she kind of did a little Spirit dance and I studied and, really, after that she left.

But I never was so glad because she shut me up in there with God. I fell across my desk and I told God, "I thought I'd given you all of me and my ministry." I said, "Oh Lord, it's not my ministry. It's not Nancy's. You gave me her, you gave me my kids, I want everything to belong to you. I want to give it all to you. If I go blind, I'll preach as long as my tongue will wiggle. I'll leave this in your hands."

Virginia stuck her head back in the door and interrupted my prayer. She said, "I'll be at the church every afternoon at four o'clock. It's my time to minister. I want you to come by, let me pray for you."

I thought it'd be a freezing day in the summer in this Delta before I'd go by and let her pray for me. But, sure enough, one afternoon I was supposed to have a list of people I was going to visit. I visited my people and visited the men, walked and saw their cattle and went to their stores, out when they were plowing, drove their tractors for them, and so on.

I'd left my list and I came back to get my list of the ones expecting me that afternoon and that old brown Pontiac was out there in front of the church. And I knew she was in there praying. And I thought, "I'm going to catch her, she's not praying, she's reading Agnes Sanford's *Healing Light*, she's always trying to get me to read."

I went to the sanctuary, cracked the back door, and she wasn't praying. She was sitting at the altar with her hands raised, looking right at me. I was going to catch her and she caught me. She said, "Come on in, honey, let me pray for you."

All the way down that aisle I was saying, "Oh God, help me. I've become one of her old biddies." I knelt and she put her hands on my head and prayed for me. And I felt the strangest thing and it kind of frightened me. This penetrating heat all the way through me, especially in my eyes. I thought, "That crazy woman is pushing my eyes in and they're bleeding." I'd been hurt in football and inner bleeding feels warm, you know.

I reached up and pulled her hands off my eyes. I said, "You tricked me. You've got a hand-warmer in your pocket."

She said, "Hand-warmer, what's that?"

I said, "Hunters use it. You know what that is?"

She said, "No, I don't know what that is."

I said, "I felt warm."

She said, "Praise God, honey! God's healing you." Then she got up and left and shut me up in my sanctuary with God.

I had my prayer all over again, surrendering to him at the altar. But my ministry and Nancy's ministry, it's ours, it took off. Nancy felt called to the mission field. That was a hard time about convincing her to marry me. She thought she was supposed to go the mission field. I finally convinced her I was her mission field and we were going to do ministry together.

JE: When do you notice that your sight is returning?

JB: God didn't heal me quickly. He knew I needed to grow in the Spirit, understand what was going on with Virginia; what was happening in my church with men coming and leading their wives and kids to the altar.

I went back to Memphis to see Dr. John Wesley McKinney periodically. After about a year, I went back to see Dr. McKinney. He tested both my eyes and he said, "Huh. This is really strange."

I said, "What do you mean, it's strange?"

He said, "We'd given up on that left eye and you're seeing better out of it than you are the right eye."

I said, "How in the world do you explain that?"

He said, "No explanation except God did it."

I said, "You're a physician and you talk that way?"

He said, "You're a pastor and you can't handle that?"

And I got in the car and I could see well enough to drive, but I'd borrowed a Bug, Volkswagen, so I'd have enough room to miss when I went off the street, you know. I drove that Bug so fast I got stopped by a cop. And he said, "What's wrong with you?"

I said, "I've been going blind."

He jumped away from the car like it was going to bite him. He said, "I'm going to have you checked on the way to Charleston if you drive the speed limit."

I did, drove up into Miss Virginia's yard, ran in and picked her up and whirled her around. She said, "Put me down, funny boy." I set her down. She said, "What's the matter with you?"

I said, "Miss Virginia, we'd given up on the left eye and God's healing the left eye."

She said, "I thought it was the right eye."

I said, "You crazy cooch, you can't even remember which eye it is."

She said, "You sorry cuss, the Lord ought to let you go blind. What difference does it make with which eye he begins?"

I said, "Begins? You think he's going to heal both of them?"

She just slapped me on both sides of my face and said, "Do I have to do all the believing for you?"

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: Wonderful lesson. The burden for healing is in the body of Christ in the church. The one being healed just has to receive. I needed to learn that. Or you was ahead, though I didn't know it at that time.

JE: Yeah. Well, it took a year, you said, before the healing began? And then when was it complete?

JB: Well, it started in the left eye and then went to my right eye. And in the midst of our pastorate at Lexington, probably a year later, I received twenty/twenty vision again in both eyes and central vision. I've still got Chorioretinitis scars in the side vision. When I open both eyes, I don't have a blind spot, but with one eye, I've got a blind spot, very close to central vision. But I've spent all these years in the ministry with scars in my eyes to evidence what happened to me. And remembering a doctor, who believed in medicine and prayer.

JE: So your healing experience came through medicine—

JB: And prayer.

JE: . . . prayer.

JB: Yes, yes.

JE: Have you ever wondered if you hadn't prayed if the medicine would have healed you anyway?

JB: Don't know, it doesn't matter to me which happened.

JE: That's good, I like that.

JB: I just got healed.

JE: Exactly.

JB: You know, being a minister, I was prone to believe that both worked. And I've prayed for people who have been healed since then. Prayer/medicine I thought did it, and in other cases, they had not had any medicine.

JE: Yeah.

JB: This did something to mine and Nancy's ministry, it just absolutely set it on fire. So I wanted to go back and study. And we left Mississippi again and went back to Georgia. I felt that if God could heal eyes, he could make a way where there was no way for poor couples that didn't really have the money.

JE: Um-hmm (agreement).

Chapter 11 - 8:00**Buskirks Come to Tulsa**

John Erling: Billy Graham is fifteen years old than you, he's ninety-five now. Um—

Jim Buskirk: Oral Roberts was fifteen years older than I.

JE: Okay, they were the same age. You're eighty now. You'd also heard about Billy Graham early on.

JB: Yes.

JE: Did you ever see him in those early years of your life?

JB: Well, I was teaching in 1973. They had a key '73 event, Lausanne, Switzerland. The school paid my way to go. And I met him there and shook his hands, and later was to meet him many times at ORU when he'd come and visit with us there and I'd have lunch with Billy Graham and Oral.

JE: You must have been taken as a young man though, these two, in your thinking and talking evangelism yourself?

JB: I was overwhelmed with Billy Graham. I could go to a crusade and watch those people go down there and I'd weep, wish I was doing that. But Nancy and I never sought any particular ministry. We were called about it and had to make sure God was calling us. I was never sure that God was calling me to be an evangelist and I didn't dare go. I was already dependent on his leadership. And I've learned how to depend. That was the most solid thing in the ministry that we were having.

JE: What ministry do you think you were being called to, if it wasn't evangelism?

JB: Well, that's why we were planning on going back to Memphis, live there and do evangelism from there, in the latter part of our being at Candler, finishing the doctorate.

While I was finishing the doctorate, Ben Johnson, who had started the lay witness mission, good friend of mine, called me and said, "They're having a Holy Spirit conference in Chattanooga. That's more your thing than mine, but come drive up there with me.

So we drove to Chattanooga. E. Stanley Jones was supposed to speak in the middle of the program. His plane didn't get there and they asked me to preach. And I got up and preached in the freedom of the Spirit. It turned out Bob Stamps was there.

Bob Stamps was chaplain at ORU. He invited me to come for chapel at ORU. So I came out for Friday chapel, thinking I'd preach and go back to Atlanta, and that'd be the end of it. But when I finished preaching that morning, I had shared about my eyes, Bob Stamp had encouraged me to. When I finished preaching, Oral got up out of the bleachers, he had sat back there rather than down in front of me, and he was first one down. He said, "May I have the microphone?"

I made a mistake and I said, "You're the proprietor, it belongs to you," and I gave it to him.

And he started crying, and said, "I've been disobedient and I need the student body to pray for me." I swallowed hard. He said, "God wants me to build a university and I've had fear that if I built a university we'd lose the undergraduate school. And during my disobedience in the last six months praying about this, we've had more breaking of the moral code here than anytime in my presidency. And I'm afraid that's rubbed off on you. I need to repent and I need you to pray for me." And he just dropped to his knees and started crying.

And they sat there, maybe center, they just sat there frozen. And I guess to kind of play Oral Roberts, I said, "Are you still going to sit there and look at him and pray for him? Are you going to pray for him like Oral Roberts prays for people? You want to come down here and lay your hands on him?"

And they came out of the bleachers, I mean, they came from every direction. I don't know anybody that didn't move out of the bleachers. And they were touching somebody who was touching somebody who was touching somebody until they got to Oral. And this one girl broke out in tongues and then she started praying for him. Said, "Lord, he's a five-year-old with wrinkles."

That overwhelmed me. He had the spirit of a five years old person, but he was a man with wrinkles. I wish the world could have known that Oral Roberts. Something happened that day to me. I was willing to do anything, go into any kind of ministry.

Well, Oral got up and announced, drying his tears, "I'm going to ask Dr. Buskirk to speak to all the ministerial students in the morning." And then in the morning he announced, "I'm going to ask him to do Saturday night Watch." And I did Saturday night Watch.

Then Sunday morning, Oral told me he wanted to drive me back to the airport, I had to get back to teach at Candler. On the way to the airport he said, "We ought to have a theology school in this university." He said, "If you were going to build a theology school, what would it be like?"

I told him all the good things we were doing at Candler and all the things I wish seminaries were doing. I used to say, "If seminaries would just do it this way, we'd have better pastors, better evangelists, better missionaries."

He said, "Well, what way is that?"

And I said, "Well, seminaries are mind trips. It's too mental. The minds ought to be involved. The Holy Spirit will water the mind, I know that. I've heard you say that on your programs. But it ought not to be a mind trip. The Holy Spirit ought to lead and the mind ought to track."

He said, "Say that again," and I did. He said, "Say it again." And I did. He said, "I want you to be the dean of that seminary."

Gosh, I thought I was going to faint. I thought I was going to pass out. I said, "Oral, I don't know anything about deaning."

He said, "Good. God'll give you everything you need to do, it'll be his seminary. I'm glad you don't know anything."

So I got on the plane and went back to Atlanta. Nancy and I prayed about it, and then Carl and Bob Stamps came out and talked to us in our den out there. And Carl, I was impressed with Carl. Carl was Mr. Education at ORU.

JE: Carl?

JB: Hamilton. Dr. Carl Hamilton.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

JB: He's brilliant. He knows academia and he knows administration. Nineteen sixty, Oral said to him, "Carl, you been planning on doing a doctorate, when are you going to do it?"

He said, "Well, I want to go do one at Arkansas."

He said, "Well, we're going to start a university. Don't you think you ought to get at it?"

So he went to the University of Arkansas and got his doctor's degree. He studied it knowing he was going to be a Doctor of Academics and a Doctor of Administration. Oral had the visions, the big visions, but Carl Hamilton put those together.

Oral used to say to his nephew about building, "Now this is what's to be in it, now put the skin on it." Oral was a visionary. Oral was a man who looked at the future. And Carl made it happen in the present. He was something I had never beheld before.

JE: Let me take you back again and repeat and maybe you said it already. When Oral was so moved after you spoke—

JB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: . . . in that chapel service, what was it again that was breaking him? What was his issue?

JB: I thought in my own mind later that he was teaching the student body to be a healing and a praying people. But at the time, and I think this is right, at that particular time I think his heart was broken because he was being disobedient to God.

JE: In what way?

JB: He was not starting a university.

JE: Okay.

JB: He was not starting. He had it in his mind, but he hadn't started it.

JE: Okay, but you talk about chapel, so I thought it was in chapel of his school.

JB: Yeah, yeah.

JE: No?

JB: No. He wanted to add to the undergraduate. This was an undergraduate thing—

Nancy Buskirk: The chapel.

JB: The undergraduate chapel. And he and his faculty and Carl had been discussing a university.

JE: Okay.

JB: I go back to Atlanta.

JE: Right.

JB: Start talking about it with Nancy. And Nancy said, “I don’t understand. You’re always saying schools should just do it this way, we’d have a lot better preaches, evangelists, and missionaries.”

I said, “I don’t know Oral Roberts. I know Dean Laney, I love our dean here, and our boss, and I don’t know anything about Tulsa, I love Atlanta.”

JE: Yeah.

JB: “I’d be happy for our children to grow up here, but it’s going to be hard to live with you if you’re being disobedient to who you are.”

JE: Um-hmm (agreement).

JB: And I said, “Go get some boxes. We’re going to ORU.” They came back and Meadow were with me and made a covenant together about the Spirit leading and the mind tracking. Our children came with us. They were just young guys. They didn’t say anything, just spoke to him, shook his hand and then he wanted to pray for us. And when he prayed you’d a thought Angela was his girl. You would a thought Chris was his son. He just read their minds and their spirits. It was wonderful.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: Carl, Evelyn, and poor Oral got on our knees somewhere in that process and committed to the kind of university we were dreaming about.

JE: That would have been 1976?

JB: That’s right.

JE: All right.

JB: 1976.

Chapter 12 - 2:50

Body, Mind, and Spirit

John Erling: The school would advertise their mission statement, “Body, Mind, and Spirit.”

Jim Buskirk: Yes.

JE: Whose idea was that?

JB: All of us wanted to do that. It's a special thing about school theology, it was the heart of the university. And Oral got this idea, body, mind, and spirit, so he got the aerobics center. That was healing the whole man, the whole person, we would say now.

Later, Oral asked himself, "What are those inevitable needs? Those inescapable needs that all human beings will have?" And he said, "Well, they're going to need a doctor, they're going to get sick. They need a minister if they're going to know the Lord. They need business and they need dentistry and nurses." He named all the areas for which we were going to have school, they needed education.

Then Oral's idea, and it was a gem, was that we were going to be a whole person junior university for a whole person's world. That's never been heard of anywhere else. Oral heard from God, and Dr. Hamilton put that in academic terms and academic classes so that would be a possibility.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound). You know, I admired him for this thing of body, mind, and spirit.

JB: Yes.

JE: Because we now know today how we're all active in keeping our body healthy and whole.

JB: Yes.

JE: He was ahead of this curve that's on right now.

JB: That's right.

JE: By proclaiming body, mind, and spirit.

JB: Oh yes.

JE: He was way ahead of it.

JB: Many years ahead of it.

JE: Yeah.

JB: That was amazing. People respond to that all over. We had to do aerobic points at ORU. I had to do aerobic points. Everybody there did exercise. The classes were very, very stimulating. He was ahead in media. The lectures were on tape, and they had places at graduate housing so if you miss a lecture you could go there and hear the lecture. Way before virtual campuses, which are all over the place now.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: Has been ever since seminaries were first started. But ORU was a place that was very much part of the bloodstream of the university.

JE: How did he prepare? Didn't he really have to prepare his sermons?

JB: I think Oral had a steel trap mind. I think he had a filing cabinet in his head. He had his best thoughts just when he was doing nothing. One Sunday morning, he drove through the campus and saw what was in a triangle where the learning resource center later would be. He said, "That's a triangle. Now that's not complete and I knew it wasn't complete. Lord, what's supposed to go on the other part of that?" And university was in his mind, and he said, "Hmm."

So you know what they did? They put two hundred feet on one side of that triangle, on the right side of it, and they put another triangle on the other side and enlarged both and said, "Now, I've got my diamond."

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: He was amazing.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: God spoke to him and he knew how to listen.

Chapter 13 - 3:30

City of Faith

John Erling: Oral believed, obviously, strongly in prayer.

Jim Buskirk: Yes.

JE: And medicine. Tell us about that in the City of Faith.

JB: Well, I'd been healed by prayer and medicine. I think that's why Oral asked me to give my testimony at all the lay seminars. Dean of Medicine and Dean of Theology, office side by side down at the City of Faith, offices were next door to each other. We had constant discussion. Oral made that choice that we would be there so that prayer and medicine would be very strong there. It's was God's idea and it should have happened, it should have continued to happen.

We had a lot of trouble when we tried to get that accredited. Went to Oklahoma City. I think the other hospitals didn't understand prayer and medicine. They argued in the case there that prayer and medicine didn't mix. They argued from a medical viewpoint.

JE: But they also said at that time that we had enough hospital rooms as it was.

JB: Yes. I was hesitating from saying that, but that's exactly what they said.

JE: Right.

JB: And now those same hospitals, at least here in Tulsa, have other representations of their hospitals, you know, out in suburbia, in Tulsa.

JE: Right.

JB: So that was really not a valid argument.

JE: But, despite that argument, it was obviously accredited anyway.

JB: Yeah. We were accredited to operate here but we ran out of money.

JE: So that's the answer. Why did they run out of money?

JB: I don't really know the answer to that. It's unbelievably expensive to have a School of Theology and a hospital and keep that going. You know, Catholic hospitals have a whole

Catholic Church behind them. Individuals start those. Sometimes I felt like those who were church hospitals felt the competition strongest.

St. Johns had a great spirit toward us. They even offered to let our graduate school people work down there. I was present in a meeting with Oral and Jim Winslow.

At that time, Oral was not ready to compromise. Though people who train in undergrads do go to other schools and graduate and so on.

JE: Yeah.

JB: Oral felt like the idea of prayer and medicine caught on all over the nation. And I find it hard to believe that that's why the City of Faith was there. I'm glad that happened, so glad that happened. I just praise God for that, but I think that was the failure in human kind, to follow God's leading.

I believe that there have been other City of Faith-like hospitals and yet will be. But until that time, maybe some conglomeration of those who graduated while City of Faith was in operation would put that together. And then it'd catch on.

But I think that if God's perfect will is done, our hospitals will be a place of prayer and medicine. I've had people pray for me in hospitals who don't know I'm a minister.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: I've had doctors who asked me if they may pray for me.

JE: I think when I talked to Oral about why it came to an end, he drew from it exactly what you said. The idea of spirit and medicine.

JB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: That's what he feels was the lasting legacy of the City of Faith.

Nancy Buskirk: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: I think that's correct.

JE: I think he felt good about that.

JB: Um-hmm (affirmative). And our students from ORU are going all over the world. Dr. Hamilton has been in twenty-six countries and found graduates in all those countries.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: And it's a dream of the President of ORU now to establish sister schools on every continent. I don't know where God's going to take this or how many more years he'll choose to have to work on it, but I expect to be watching from somewhere.

JE: Right.

Chapter 14 – 4:15**Buskirks Leave ORU**

John Erling: Let us talk about why you left ORU.

Jim Buskirk: I was a friend of Bishop Hart. He preached in town and I went to hear him. I loved his wife, she was a precious lady. Dr. Thomas spoke to me several times about I ought to follow him at First Methodist. His word was, “They have servant hearts but they don’t know how to take the handles out.” And I helped them do that. That’s literally what my program was about. I, uh, ministry was motivation and mobilizing the lay ministries.

But anyway, Bishop Hart called me about, I guess, April, and asked me about going to First Methodist. I said, “I can’t do that. I haven’t finished my covenant here at ORU. We’re going to produce a PhD at the School of Theology, a PhD degree, and we’re going to produce professors who evidently will go to all the other schools. Because ORU professors draw students and ORU School of Theology can bring ORU spirit to all the theology schools that hire a professor with a PhD from ORU.”

And I think that’s a dream that hasn’t happened yet. And that breaks my heart that that’s the case. Bishop Hart had called me in the summer of 1984, and asked me if I’d consider going to First Methodist. I said, “I can’t I got to keep that covenant.”

It was amazing, it was about three weeks after that Oral asked me to come to his office, and I went up there. And he said, “We’re going to take the savings from the PhD and Theology and put it in City of Faith. We just got to have that money.”

And I said, “Oral, I think that’s where it ought to be. You and I made a covenant about that, Evelyn and Carl was present, and you’re breaking the covenant.”

He said, “I don’t understand why that’s so important.” He said, “You’ve always been able to be frank with me.”

I said, “All right. It’s going to feel like about fifteen minutes from now you and I are going to stand before God, and he’s going to say, ‘What happened to my PhD degree where the Spirit led and the mind tracked?’ And I’m going to tell God I did all I could do, and you’re going to be in a mess.”

Oral kind of drops his head and said, “Do you think so?”

And Evelyn said, “Honey, I think he’s right.” And hadn’t been for Evelyn, she saved my cookies a lot of times.

But I said, “I’m going to come back and talk about that in two or three days and you pray about that.” I didn’t want to push. I came back in two or three, four days, I don’t know, and asked him if he still felt the same way.

He said, “Yes I do, it just has to be. I don’t want it to be but it’s got to be.”

I told Oral, "I'll be leaving in the next year."

And Oral said, "I don't want you to leave. I don't want you to ever go anywhere else."

I said, "Well, I'll leave now if you want me to."

And he said, "I don't want you to leave."

So I called Bishop Hart and I said, "Bishop Hart, I want you to know that I told you I couldn't go to First Methodist. And I'm sure you've been interviewing these three weeks." Ministers in large churches in the Methodist church go for an interview. And if they say no to the first one they usually send the second one and a third one. If they go say no to all three of them then they have to go outside the state. They go outside the state and many bishops won't let them come back in. So it's more of a Presbyterian system in that light.

I told him what had happened and I said, "I don't want you to think I fibbed to you. And this has happened."

Bishop Hart said, "Can I have breakfast with you in the morning in Tulsa?"

We went to breakfast together and prayed about that. He said, "I've interviewed some other ministers but I haven't sent them to First Methodist. If you're going to go somewhere in a year, pray about that."

Two weeks later, I was senior minister at First Methodist. An amazing thing about this ministry that belongs to God and is everybody else's story, this ministry is for Nancy and me.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: As we went to First Methodist, Evelyn and Oral came quite regularly down there to hear me preach. Invited me back to ORU. They'd come down to the altar and pray and our people loved that. They'd crowd around them and pray with them and so on.

I invited Oral down, we did a dialogical sermon down there together in the pulpit. About halfway through he said, "Jim, come on up here and help me tell this story." We stood in the pulpit together and preached. Oral wouldn't call me until the last minute. You know, I preached in chapel because Oral didn't feel like it at the last ten minutes. I never went to chapel without an outline in my pocket.

In Chattanooga, E. Stanley Jones didn't show up and I substituted for him and I came to ORU, you know. E. Stanley Jones, I met him later because of that. First Methodist and Oral were very close together. I think he joined Boston Avenue because the pastor from Boston Avenue came and asked him, with the Bishop.

Chapter 15 - 2:00**Dr. Thomas**

John Erling: When you first came to First Methodist—

Jim Buskirk: Uh-huh (questioning agreement).

JE: . . . Dr. Thomas, after a week or two, died.

JB: That's right. It just broke our hearts. He came by my office on the Wednesday, after I had preached on Sunday, and told me he was going to Colorado and he was going to lose twenty pounds in three weeks.

I said, "Bill, be very careful, that air is thin." And that kind of came back to haunt me. In our second week there, we were in staff meeting on Tuesday, and they came in and told us that they'd found Dr. Thomas dead on the trail. He had done some exercises that morning and then he ran after his exercises. And I don't know whether he was pushing it or not.

But the second Sunday I was in the pulpit at First Methodist, we were all brokenhearted. I knew Bill Thomas. We preached together in Holy Spirit conferences all over the place. He was on a committee at the City of Faith, our hearts were one. It was hard to preach that second Sunday.

JE: Yeah.

JB: We cried together.

Nancy Buskirk: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: But God gave us what you normally would experience with a congregation in six months or a year, in those two weeks. God lives with delays and he can speed them up at the same time. His funeral was something. He was a great minister. He was a lawyer in Oklahoma City and went into the ministry at forty. He was his own seminary. He studied every morning, didn't come to the office until noon. He had a good staff.

Wade Paschal was there, he bragged on Wade Paschal. Now Wade Paschal is senior minister there. He was there during my ministry, he was my Executive Minister while I was there. Great staff.

Connie Ichord has been there forever. I bet she's been there thirty-five, going on forty, years. Dr. Thomas hired her. There was an excellent staff there when I got there. I enjoyed that staff immensely. They were short about two staff ministers. If you have a minister for every five hundred people, you can visit them every year. So they agreed and we hired two more ministers. Hired Bob Macadoo and Jessica Moffit.

Chapter 16 – 3:05**Community Ministries**

John Erling: What year was it when you came to First Methodist?

Jim Buskirk: I came to First Methodist in 1984, September.

JE: And he'd been minister there for?

JB: Eighteen years.

JE: Eighteen years. So his fingerprint is still on that church today in 2013.

JB: Oh yes. All over.

JE: But you too have a fingerprint on that church. Didn't you bring the Community Ministries idea?

JB: Yes I did. We waited a year to do that. I wanted to teach and preach the Bible and I wanted to talk about the major big ideas in the Bible and the Christian faith. So I preached from September to the next September. And then we had a mobilizing the laity for ministry event. I preached Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday morning.

We'd hired Jessica Moffit in the process of that and she really lit up with that. Later we put her in charge of that and she went and did those missions herself. She hired Connie Cole Jeske now. Connie picked up those missions and she's done them elsewhere. People from Candler do them. Students from ORU do them.

Dr. Thomas said Jesus, in his time, teaching, preaching, and healing. I believe the church is believing, belonging, and becoming. These were the themes that went through the whole of my time there.

I remember one of the ministry groups was when the economy was so low we had jobs first when Debbie Pruitt came. She was doing her doctorate over at Oklahoma State University. She was there, I think, on Q Avenue and 3rd Avenue. If you needed a job you called her. If you knew somebody that needed a job you called her. I think American Airlines hired sixteen of our people.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: We got jobs and then some of them didn't have ways to get there. Somebody gave us an old Oldsmobile, a diesel, a '90 Oldsmobile, that thing bites you, it argues, it quit on you. And I told the guy that gave it to us, "I'm going to make fun of that car." Then we had dealers in our church, automobile dealers. We said, "If you've got an old dog and you're not going to get much out of it, give it to the church. Get a tax credit for it."

We got some dealer give us that. Men in the church took that tire building next door to us, Bergraph, I think it was called, and they'd repair those old cars. And then that grew to be a ministry, a huge ministry. We had probably fifteen men working on those cars. If a

person needed a car who was a member of First Methodist and another one who needed and was not, we gave it to the one who was not. And then carpool with that person who didn't have one until we had a car there.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: You know they've given away more than three hundred cars while I was there.

JE: Wow.

JB: And that went on for a year or two. Maybe it's still going on, I don't know. But ministries like that that have never happened anywhere else, as far as I know, happened. And it was wonderful. We had simple things, handyman. A lot of people could do carpet work and you need something done in your house, you call Debbie and she'd send somebody out there.

One lady was real cute, she said, "I got a light bulb up over my stairs. I can't get up there to change that light bulb." She said, "This nicest man comes and changes it for me." She said, "I managed to get up there and screw the light bulb loose so the man would have to come back and put me a light bulb. He's a real nice guy." Things like that, you know.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: An amazing time.

Chapter 17 - 5:00

Celebration of Centennial

John Erling: Then came time to celebrate the centennial at First Methodist Church.

Jim Buskirk: Yeah.

JE: One hundred years. A little bit about that.

JB: During the centennial, our slogan was "Catch the Spirit." We had a picture of a dove flying and something off his wings behind. Two of the men in the church designed that. Through "Catch the Spirit" we talked a lot about the Spirit at First Methodist. We started doing dream teams. I do a lot of dreaming and sometimes an image to dream a little bit. So I created a dream team.

We'd ask them, "What do you like about First Methodist? What can we do to improve it? What do you think among our dreams may be God's vision for the church?"

I remember we didn't that many young adults, like twenty-one up to late thirties. So I started having a sandwich, coffee and drinks, and a salad in my office. And my secretary would come in and take notes. We'd ask those questions and then people who didn't participate in leadership of the church came. We had sixteen of those, and I could get twenty people in my office. She took notes and we took those down. Each pastor had a

dream team. We got up, I think, to eighteen pastors while I was there. Had almost nine thousand members, one for every five.

Church even said, "Well, what about the ones out there leading those five men?" That's why we brought Bob Macadoo in. A second reason. But we asked the ministers to have their secretaries take notes. Then we got together as a bank of dreams. We had a chair of the bank of dreams. We'd get together monthly and discuss those dreams. My executive committee became my dream team. We used to call them executive committee. I had twenty-five of those, and I got a bushel of stuff from that.

Whatever kind of rose to the top after the majority of the church, I'm talking about 75, 85 percent of the people, saw the need and wanted to do it, they were motivated. It was not difficult to get them to do it. Then we got the dream during the centennial year that we ought to pay off the children's building that Dr. Thomas had built. We ought to pay off Bergraph. We started having men's breakfasts and first thing we knew that was paid off.

Then the dream team started and they went on beyond the centennial year. It caught fire in Missions. Somebody in Missions had a dream that we'd go and do more missions. At the time, we had only thirty thousand in Missions that year for outside the church. We had five or six missionaries we were supporting. And I said, "Should we stop faith promises? Is there something wrong with that?"

They wrote us a letter and said, "Whatever the church raises we'll match." I don't know who it was, never found out who it was. They wrote us through a legal firm. They were formed in secrecy, the letter wasn't signed. I saw the letter, it was just a faithful member or something on it.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: Never found out. Well, we jumped it up to seventy that year, they matched it and the next year we made it about 150, they matched it. Next year went over two hundred, they matched it. So they put at least a quarter million dollars, maybe near a half million, in Missions. And then we got a letter saying, "We're off and running now." Were we ever.

We had over a hundred men in the church who could do work on the mission field. Electricians, plumbers, finishers, foundation-layers, concrete-pourers, you name it, they could do it. There was a time there in a six-year period when we built a building and a half every year that I was there. We'd send five groups of ten men. They'd stay ten days, and fifty men in that period of time, could build a building that could take care of three hundred people on the mission field. We built churches, cafeterias, dormitories for boys and girls, and orphanage homes, pastors' houses, worship centers, you name it, we built it.

I got a chance to go to an island to build a church. There was a baptism of babies that day and we baptized sixty-something babies. I just was dead tired when I finished, you know.

But I guess our greatest miracle in Missions was probably when Chris Henna came through. She was a black woman that was born in Liberia, went to Communistic Russia to get her doctor's degree, came to Candler School of Theology to get her social worker's degree. She went to the City of Faith and had surgery for breast cancer when we were doing that seed faith giving. It didn't cost her a penny.

I went to one of our families, Terry and Sharon Davis, and they just took care of her bodily for about six months or a year. Just kind of an adopted daughter.

The Methodist Mission Board sent her to Moscow. She stayed there about eight years. Went from there to Kazakhstan. Now she's back in Liberia in her home place and she did need a women's ministry. She's getting government support and everything else. Recently somebody in Texas sent her a gift of \$200,000. She didn't even know that person, just heard about what she was doing.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: God reached through ORU and Candler and First Methodist. It's amazing how God put all that together. There has to be a God doing all this stuff.

Chapter 18 - 4:35

Youth and Family Center

John Erling: Speaking of building then, it was after the centennial that the Youth and Family Center was built.

Jim Buskirk: Oh yes. We got the idea that we ought to expand. So for, I guess, two years, we had those men's breakfasts and raised money. We started buying the buildings, the businesses on those two blocks east of us. I think there are like twenty-three businesses and we bought sixteen or eighteen of them, some of them are still there. That's parking lot now. But the Youth and Family Center is sitting on that.

A brief story. I wanted to have two buildings, one for recreation and one for quiet stuff for classes. And they said, "It's too expensive to have two buildings, we've got to have one building."

I said, "Okay. Majority wins." I was at peace about it.

Two days later they came in my office and said, "We got problems. A lot of pipes that carry cords that light downtown Tulsa run right through the middle of that block. We didn't know it." They said, "We've got to build something there that they can go through on a golf cart."

And I said, "Well, what if we built a breezeway and made it weight-supporting on the sides so that we could take up the middle of it and the walls and the ceiling won't come

down, and take care of that? They're taking care of it now. If they can dig in the ground why can't they do that?"

"You and your two buildings."

I said, "Well, it wouldn't have come back around if it hadn't been God's idea." So we got two buildings. It was a chore to see that come together.

The young people came and said, "Dr. B., we got a dream." That's where we started a dream and then, "Is it God's vision?" you know.

I said, "Okay, what it is?"

"We don't like the youth building."

"You don't like the youth building? It cost eight million dollars. You tell me quick what you don't like about it."

They said, "Well, we want a prayer chapel. It doesn't have to be big. We want a place where ten or twelve of you can get together, maybe a place to kneel, one or two seats, maybe these cushions will be all right. We want a place where we can get together where we can pray."

I said, "You shall have it. We ought to put it in there."

And they said, "We want Jesus to be all over that building."

I said, "How do you plan to do that?"

"Well, we'll be praying and we'll be talking to our friends and bringing our school mates, but we want Jesus to be all over that building."

I said, "Let me pray about that. We're going to do that someday." I said, "You know, it says in Scripture, Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man. He was twelve years old when he went in the Temple. Maybe we can do something with that."

They said, "Yeah, maybe we could. How do we do that?"

I took it to the dream team. They thought about it and somebody said, "What about a structure? Rosalyn Cook does these bronze statues, reckon she could do a thing of Jesus?"

We called her, and she said, "Well, I did a bronze stature for World Vision."

I saw her during that time, she's got like a garage that goes way up, two stories, that she does things in. She had Jesus and the little children running to him. You probably seen that bronze thing. We started talking about Jesus and I said, "They want it to be really visible."

"Well, let's put it in the entrance way. What would that be like?" And Rosalyn did a seven-foot twelve-year-old. Had somebody model for it. There was a foundation around the bottom of it and kids could sit around that. They just wore it bright, shiny, because they're sitting on that thing. We wrote around the bottom of the foundation, "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man." Now it's out in front of the Children and Youth building, the new Children's building that Dr. Paschal and the church had built together.

By the way, Dr. Paschal also built that Adult building we dreamed of. We started getting pledges, maybe 50 percent of them, but we hadn't gotten the money. And Dr. Paschal and the church raised that money and built the Adult Center. God's just still taking it on.

We've all seen that bronze, it is marvelous. We've got a miniature of it in our house and we treasure that very, very much.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: But God just works in tremendous ways. They said, "One other thing, when we were upstairs in the old building adults were all around. We sat on our knees together on the floor together, we liked them nearby. We don't want it to be a Youth building, we want it to be Youth and Adult building."

I said, "What about Youth and Family building?"

"Yeah, we want that. That sounds good." So it became the Youth and Family Center.

Thank God for Bob Cooley, he stayed over there and watched them build that building. They made mistakes, they corrected when they made them, right after it was all finished, you know? God just put that together in a marvelous way and we are so, so grateful for that.

I was worn out when the building was built. I was soul tired, not body tired. I promised early in my life I'd never build a building. Daddy built buildings and always got in trouble what he did it. But anyway, I was tired.

Chapter 19 - 5:10

Retirement

Jim Buskirk: One morning Nancy and I got up and started praying about how weary we were, and so on. And we felt like it was time for us to retire. We prayed about that for a month or two and then knew it was, we just knew it was.

John Erling: Who did you talk to about that?

JB: We talked to the Lord and talked to each other. I called the Bishop about it that we were thinking about it. And got up and announced in on Sunday morning at the church. That was the first they knew about it. I announced it in November that we would be retiring at the end of January.

JE: The board, officials of the church, and all, nobody knew it? It was the first—

Nancy Buskirk: Uh-uh (negative).

JB: Nancy and I had a strange ministry. We never asked to go anywhere, never sought to go anywhere. When God called us we went and God came and blessed. We felt that we

were still called, but somehow we felt like it was time for that chapter to close. So we announced that, and in January of 2001 we retired there. Didn't really retire.

JE: And what does that mean, retirement?

JB: I don't know. By the way, when I left ORU I was asked to be on the Trustees up there. And I joined the Trustees and became Chair of the Trustees up there and we built another campus in Florida while I was up there.

NB: Asbury.

JB: Asbury in Florida, Asbury Seminary. It's in Wilmore, Kentucky, and now in Orlando, Florida.

Max A. Dunnam, who was the President of Asbury Seminary and a classmate of mine at Candler back when we were doing our master's program, called me and said, "We're building that campus in Orlando, Florida, and I've got to hire more professors than we can afford." He said, "What about you? You can teach preaching and church administration and evangelism. You taught evangelism at Emory, didn't you?"

"That's right."

He said, "You could teach those three and I could put off hiring those professors."

I said, "I don't want to do anything full-time. And I don't want to leave Tulsa."

He said, "Well, what about part-time?"

I said, "Okay." I taught about one or two courses a year for six years. I asked Max, "How long am I going to be there?"

He said, "Three years will do it."

I stayed six years and he hadn't brought it up, so after six years I said, "Max, you're not going to hire those other professors until I quit. So I quit yesterday."

He started hiring those professors. There were other people who came in and taught those courses when I couldn't get to those places, so he had people there to kind of bridge him over that. I knew that would happen.

Then after that, we came home and rested for about six months. And the Bishop called and we went to Collinsville. That was a nine-month's time and we loved there. They had had a study of their church and they were ready to build their next building. So we got into the want to process and the building of the building. And when we left, they were ready to start that building.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: Then after that, I guess the high point of my ministry as family-wise, they asked Chris and me to do father and son retreats all over the United States.

JE: We should point out, Chris—

JB: Chris is—

JE: . . . became a minister.

JB: . . . my son.

JE: Yes, but he's an ordained Methodist minister?

JB: Yes. He has Abiding Harvest United Methodist Church on Elm and 111th Street out across from Tulsa Technology. He had ministered in Georgia and then came back and ministered with us on staff. When I went there he was Youth Minister at First Methodist, and they said, "What if you and the senior minister don't get along? What's going to happen then?" He said, "He'd have to leave, I've got seniority."

Ministered there and then ministered in Houston with Bill Hinson, a friend of ours and Bill, to a second church there. And he and Bill exchanged pulpits. And then he heard about this new church they were going to start in Tulsa, and came back here. He wanted to preach to his high school friends. He came back and been there now sixteen, almost seventeen years.

There are five jurisdictions in the United States. Divide the United States into five parts and fathers and sons came. Sometimes we'd have three or four thousand fathers and sons there. Sometimes we'd have three hundred. Sometimes we'd have a thousand. Chris or I, one, would preach the first sermon and then we'd do a dialogical sermon. And then whoever hadn't preached the first sermon, preached the third sermon.

Those guys brought their sons and they slept together in the same rooms. We talked about Chris's growing up, and Chris would always put me on the spot. He said, "Dad, I came home from Emory where you went to school and started telling you my dark pages. They told me that you were so affirming because you didn't know about my dark pages. A boy will be a boy and you won't tell your dad and your mother about your dark pages. Well, I was telling you about that and you got up and left the room. Mad. Why did you do that? I'd like you to explain to these fine fathers and sons why you treated me that way."

And I said, "Well, Son, I taught there, and some seminaries feel like they have to strip away what you believe and put back in your mind what they believe. That was a part of CPE, right? Clinical Pastoral Education, right?" he said.

I said, "I knew what they were doing, you see, and I got mad at those brother and sister professors who were doing that to my son."

He said, "Oh that's what's going on." He reached around and picked me up and turned me all the way around and set me back down. He's strong enough to do that.

But one man told me the next morning, "My son and I didn't sleep a wink last night. We talked all night long, but I've got no regrets."

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: "We found each other last night."

JE: That's great.

JB: That was good.

JE: But a minister never retires, do they?

JB: Not really. You know, I've looked real hard, there's no retirement clause in the Bible.

Chapter 20 - 4:15**How He Liked to Be Remembered**

John Erling: How would you like to be remembered?

Jim Buskirk: I'd like to be remembered as a minister whose ministry was a oneness with his wife, both of whom were called. I'd like to be remembered as a minister through whom the Holy Spirit flowed without any blockage. I'd like to be remembered as a minister who taught people and stirred their minds until the Holy Spirit watered them. A minister who identified with people when they were hurting so much that the body of Christ and the love chapter was at work in the congregation during that time. I'd like to be remembered as a minister who was willing to do things uniquely, as God gave him and his wife dreams of doing, so that lay people could find their ministry.

First sermon I preached was, he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the laity for their ministry, until we grew up into unity and the oneness of the body of Jesus Christ.

JE: Let me just say, one member here, while I always enjoyed your Sunday morning sermons, because I'm a production-oriented person, I appreciated the fact, it came off this way, I think it had to start with you, that that hour was production. It just clicked, it clicked, it clicked, it clicked, it clicked.

JB: Oh yes.

JE: There wasn't any dead time. And it bothers me when there is.

JB: Yes, me too.

JE: And there are a lot of ministers who don't seem to feel the urge or the need for that to happen, and they don't mind it, but it was pronto, pronto, pronto, pronto.

JB: Yes.

JE: And I'm sure when it didn't sometime you had words about it later. Is that true?

JB: I did, and I appreciate them, they're very loving. And they were fine Monday afternoon. We're usually working on the outline that morning. And then Monday afternoon I'd agree with her and she might have changed part of it. But I couldn't tell I didn't type that sermon.

JE: Yeah.

JB: During that time. And you know, when you have spiritual worship, as I said earlier, and it's ebbing and flowing, people rest spiritually. You can't stay high all the time.

JE: That's right.

JB: And the ministers need to start out and it needs to ebb and flow and you need to end on a high.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: I wanted to make people think. I wanted to make people want to love each other.

JE: Right.

JB: I wanted to make people weep tears. Henry Ward Beecher said, "Get the dew to the congregation, let God send the rain." And the dew is in their eyeballs.

It's amazing when you stand before a congregation, God gives you a brain better than you have. I could remember where most people sat. I could remember people's faces that fed me and gave me the dew back. I could say to ten or twelve people when they left, I could tell them where they were seated, you know.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: My son now is mentoring a woman who was there one Sunday morning. And they sat down near the front. When they came by to speak to him after the service, I said to her husband, "When are you going to go to work and support our wife when she becomes a minister?" I had no right to say that, but I knew that.

JE: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

JB: Now she's about to become an elder in the Oklahoma—

JE: How about that?

JB: . . . conference. I know when the congregation are agreeing, disagreeing. I like some disagreement, a little flotsam in me. I don't want the congregation to swallow what I say. I want it to make sense in them.

JE: Let me just ask you one more here.

JB: Okay.

JE: When there was some conflict in the congregation, or there has to be in every congregation—

JB: There is.

JE: . . . did you ever use the pulpit to speak to that problem? Did you ever use a message to speak to some challenge, some disagreements in the congregation?

JB: When I did, it was not in my prepared sermon, except in Coldwater when I preached on the high cost of hate. I was aware of what was going on in the congregation more than I wanted to be. And sometimes I guess I did so indirectly, but I didn't prepare to confront straight on.

I did that one time in First Methodist, I remember. I preached on Nehemiah and the criticism he got when he went back to prepare the walls in Jerusalem. And I named the criticism and preached about the criticism primarily in the sermon. And there were people in the congregation who felt like I was trying to manipulate them to do whatever the next building project was. I don't know whether it was the City of Faith or not.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Chapter 21 – 3:30**Don't Do It on Sunday**

John Erling: Nancy, you've heard Jim preach hundreds, yea, thousands of sermons.

Nancy Buskirk: Yes. I have.

JE: Are you a critiquer afterward or like on a Sunday morning sermon you'd go to lunch and you'd talk about the sermon and you tell him, "Well, you shouldn't have done this," or "You shouldn't have done that," or "This was good"?

NB: Yes. He's always wanted me to do that. He's very open to any kind of criticism or critiquing, rather. But he always says, "Do it on Monday, don't do it on Sunday." So on Monday I would tell him, you know, "I wish you'd said it this way or gone another direction with that," or "Wish you hadn't said that quite like that." He was very open to any kind of criticism.

JE: You think she gave you good direction.

NB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

Jim Buskirk: Absolutely.

NB: Yeah.

JB: I sometimes would forget a name or something and look out and she'd mouth it to me—

JE: Oh.

JB: . . . and nobody knew the difference. That's why I'd ask her to sit near the front.

NB: And I could do that also because one of the things that I did for him, after he had preached, I typed his sermons and took his outline from his little sticky pads that he had in his Bible, and I'd type his sermons, and then I would put the outline with them so that if he ever wanted to preach that sermon again. He liked to preach spontaneously from his heart.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NB: If he would write it down it would sound read.

JE: Yeah.

NB: So I enjoyed doing that.

JE: Um-hmm (affirmative).

NB: It was a blessing to me.

JE: How far back do you have them?

JB: We have all the sermons that I preached at First Methodist. And when I came there I had about five thousand.

JE: Okay. So you've saved them.

JB: Oh yes.

NB: Yes.

JB: Nancy's done them.

NB: Some of them are on tape and I have some of them typed up, not all of them.

JB: Some on video.

JE: Well, thank you.

JB: Thank you.

JE: Nancy, thank you for being here.

NB: Well, thank you.

JE: And you helped along the way.

NB: Thank you.

JE: And so the two of you, ministry together, you could never have known what's going to happen.

JB: No.

JE: You know, I keep thinking, just the fact that you were of a Methodist family and then here's Oral Roberts and the Methodist and then you end up in a Methodist church. I mean, there was a plan, wasn't there?

NB: Oh yes.

JB: Oh yes, there was. We never suspected any of it. Every place we've been, we've been asked for or surprised when we went. The only place we chose, just picked it up and did it, was going back to get the doctorate. But I wanted to catch up on my reading and I didn't want to keep preaching in the church like it was.

JE: Yeah.

JB: When Nancy and I were at Emory, she had this Bishop. She talked about she had to write her paper on Isaiah. I gave her an outline of a paper I'd written on Isaiah and it bothered her. And we ran into him at a bank in Atlanta before we came to ORU. And Nancy said, "Mr. Parrel, I want to apologize to you. I used the outline in one of Jim's papers once and I want to tell you about that repent of that."

He said, "What did you make on it?"

She said, "I made a B plus."

He said, "If you hadn't of used Jim's outline I bet you'd of made an A."

So it was a wonderful association.

JE: You're eighty years old and some people think that eighty years old is supposed to be old.

JB: Yes.

NB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: But you speak with a memory like you could be sixty years old.

JB: Well, thank you.

JE: It's true.

NB: Well, thank you.

JE: And you ought to feel real good about that.

NB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JE: And both of you at this so-called “elder” age.

JB: Well, we do.

JE: You speak and think young.

NB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: I remember things back further, and as an old person’s eye, but the details of them better than I remember the details right now. I’d like to have another decade. And I hope then that Nancy and I die together in a plane crash.

JE: Thank you very much for this time.

JB: Thank you.

NB: Yes, thank you.

JE: It was wonderful.

JB: Thank you, John. I really appreciate you doing this. It’s an honor. I didn’t deserve it, we didn’t deserve it.

JE: You did.

NB: Yeah.

JB: I appreciate your doing this. I wanted to do this.

Chapter 22 - 0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma’s legacy one voice at a time, on VoicesofOklahoma.com.