Life Journey in Ministry: 1941-2017 A Curious Adventure into Unexpected Places

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This project seeks to reach back in time over the span of my own life that began in a rock house bedroom of my maternal grandparents on Nov. 3, 1941. My mother and cowboy father had been married a couple of years and followed the normal pattern of calling in the country doctor to my mother's parents home out in the country, when it came the time for me to be born. My parents were beginning life together soon after graduating from high school when my father took a job working on the Harvey Marc ranch just north of Perrin in the southern part of Jack County Texas. With war clouds mushrooming up in 1941, few if any in the US knew that barely a month later the US would be at war both with Japan and then with Germany.

Thus, in the most normal of ways for rural Texas in the 1940s, I began my incredible journey on planet earth. As the first of eventually three children, I enjoyed, along with them, a standard experience through our growing up years. Never in my wildest imagination could I have imagined in those years the kind of journey that began unfolding for me at eventful day in November 1941. With very dedicated Christian parents, the nurturing of my life would be within the framework of sincere Christian commitment. What I did not know for many, many years was that my maternal, Pentecostal grandmother began praying for me to be called of God into Christian ministry. Of course, she assumed that it would be an Assembly of God based ministry. Instead, it turned out to be a Baptist based ministry. God clearly has a sense of humor in answering our prayers!



From this very normal beginning in 1941, my life evolved in quite a number of unusual ways, as I have come to understand over the years.

First, although born into a poor family in rural life at the edge of west Texas, I would eventually travel to many other places both inside the US, in Europe, and in Central America. Parents keenly anxious for their children to have a better life and also an insatiable curiosity about the new, strange, and unknown -- these have served as platforms for God to be better able to direct my steps in this curious journey into unexpected places.

The first 18 years in Perrin were spent in lots of hard work on a farming and ranching operation outside of town. A big trip for me was to get to go with my dad and uncle carrying a truck load of cattle to the Fort Worth stockyards some 75 miles away.

My undergraduate college years of 1960 to 1964 began in the piney woods of east Texas at Marshall but after one year I switched to the south plains of Plainview Texas. There I graduated in 1964 with a BA degree majoring in religion and minoring in English grammar. Language and language studies were rapidly becoming 'my thing.' My oldest son, Chris, was born during this time in Plainview.

My seminary study years began in August 1964 at Southwestern Baptist Theological seminary in Ft. Worth but was financed by becoming pastor of the Baptist church at Graford Texas where for four years I commuted back and forth to Fort Worth four days a week making the 150 mile round trip. The second son, Don, was born while at Graford. The successful completion of the MDiv degree opened the door for doctoral studies in 1968 and also the opportunity to become senior pastor of the much larger Springdale Baptist Church also in Ft. Worth. The third son, Greg, was born during this time. In August 1974, I became a professor of New Testament and Koine Greek at the seminary. This was my calling through December 1997.

In December 1997, Claire and I moved to Boiling Springs, North Carolina to become professor of religion and Greek at Gardner-Webb University. In 2008, retirement from teaching brought a move to Germany and then to Costa Rica to do volunteer ministry.



The beginning at <u>Perrin</u> in 1941 reflected a normal pattern for lots and lots of rural kids in the US. After being born at my grandparent's home, a couple of years later my father's rancher boss loaned him the money to purchase the 'Goddard place' about three miles southwest of Perrin, and most importantly 'across the creek' from my mother's parent's place. That place along with the purchase years later of an adjacent 80 acre place would be home for my family the rest of my parent's lives. Life was challenging then with growing up in an old clapboard house with three rooms: a bedroom, a living room, and a kitchen. We grew up in poverty even by 1940s and 50s standards. Wearing 'hand me down' clothes was norm. Prized possessions were the few new clothes that came just before school began and always at Christmas time.

But my parents were hard working folks with mother always helping daddy with the 'outside' work dealing with the cattle and the farming side of the operations. I can still remember daddy getting his first tractor, a John Deere Model B, in 1947. Gladly the work horses were semi-retired to just plowing the garden and orchard at the house. In the summer of 1953 an uncle from Long Beach, CA, installed electric lines in the house after the REA electric lines finally reached our place. My sister and brother and I always had daily chores, and also worked on the place helping make a meager living in the 1940s and 50s. With the leasing of additional pasture and farm land, the operation reached around 600 acres that the family kept going with a lot of hard work.

From the second week of my earthly life on, I have regularly been in church. Over these 75 plus years I have missed less than four weeks of attendance in Sunday school and church. My father served early on as deacon, Sunday school director, and just about every other position possible. From the early 1950s, my mother became the Minister of Music in the Baptist Church at Perrin -- something very unusual for a woman in Baptist life during those days. When she passed away in 1975, she still held that position. And my father was a leader up to his passing in 1991. Our rural church was atypical in those days with its progressive mindedness and commitment to spreading the Gospel around the world. One of the highlights of my high school years was being sent by the church with four other young people and the pastor on a two week mission trip to Chardon, Ohio in 1958. God was at work in all this!



In the world of the 1940s and 50s Perrin, family loomed large in everyone's life. Virtually every Sunday in my growing up years, my father's mother, Mom Cranford, would prepare a large Sunday dinner for all the kids and grandkids who were able to come over to their place. Often that meant twenty or more people at their house for lunch. Sunday afternoons were spent with cousins roaming the countryside, swimming in my grandfather's pond (called a lake), trying to get a bridle on his white stallion horse, Olde Smokey, in order to ride him bareback as much as possible. My sister was born two years after me, and my brother some six years after Lynelle. Lynelle would become a well known family therapist and counselor who gave lectures in her field as far away as Stockholm Sweden before her passing in 2016. My brother, Bill, went to work for Central Power and Light in Corpus Christi right after graduating from Tarleton College and retired as an executive with the power company in his mid 50s and moved to Hot Springs Village, Arkansas. Both my sister and I both have earned doctorates. But my father often took delight in saying to friends, "I have two doctors in my family, but neither one is worth a dime to me when I get sick." He always had his way of 'keeping us in our place.'

Mother and daddy placed a high premium on educational excellence. Nothing but A+ was accepted on our report cards. To my chagrin quite often, daddy was a member of the school board all twelve years of my schooling, and its president during the second six years. There was no mischief at school on my part that escaped his awareness! But we were very fortunate at Perrin High School. The oil boom in the early 1950s brought in large amounts of funding that was used to create the most up-to-date facilities possible and to supplement teachers' salaries substantially above the state pay scale. Consequently, every high school teacher but one in my years had at least a master's degree in their field of teaching. Lots of young people during those years moved on to very successful careers in many different fields.

Although Claire didn't come along in my life until 1992, she has become fully accepted into the family as well as the joy of my life. The photo above was taken at a family reunion early on in the 1990s.



When I graduated from high school in May 1960, my decision was to attend <u>ETBC in Marshall, Texas</u>, after turning down a basketball scholarship at a Baptist junior college closer to home. During my junior year of high school, I had made a commitment to Christian ministry. Up to that point, I was moving toward appointment to the new Air Force Academy in Colorado with the ambition to subsequently do a degree in aerodynamical engineering at M.I.T. in MA. But the Lord had other plans. A cousin in Perrin would realize the academy appointment, instead of me. How different my life would have been had the goal to design and fly airplanes have been realized. The legendary test pilot Chuck Yeager was the model that I wanted to follow. But the larger need to follow Jesus' leadership took top priority.

In 1960, my thinking was that I would get the needed training and then pastor churches over the rest of my life. Little did I understand how God's will would evolve for me. Marshall, Texas proved to be more disappointing than positive for me. The Baptist school was okay but the segregated old South atmosphere of Marshall at the beginning of the civil rights movement and the hugely tall pine trees that blocked most of the sunshine reaching the ground were more than I could accept. My parents had raised me to respect all people of all races. The rule that ETBC students were not to have any contact with Afro-American students in the close by Bishops' College was just too much. I encountered serious religious hypocrisy, even among ministerial students, for the first time. So, along with a significant number of other first year students, I transferred out at the end of that freshman year.

My most favorite memory of that year was learning how to preach by giving a sermon every Sunday night to a group of Afro-American ladies in the nearby TB sanitarium in Shreveport, Louisiana. Those precious ladies gave incredible encouragement to their young 'white preacher boy' who came over every Sunday evening. Another memorable event came during the Christmas holidays. Two college friends from the San Blas Islands in Panama spent the holidays with me back at Perrin. Not only were they warmly welcomed by my parents but the Baptist church through the WMU embraced them enthusiastically and began a ministry to Manual's father, a native pastor on the islands in Panama.

Thankfully the school is not today like it was in 1960.



The fall of 1961 was particularly eventful with the transfer to <u>Wayland Baptist College in Plainview</u>. I moved from the deep piney woods of east Texas to the utterly flat and treeless south plains of the Texas panhandle at Plainview. But it proved to be the best move for me. The university had de-segregated itself in 1949 at its own initiative and by 1961 had a large number of Afro-American and Hispanic students among its student body. It was a wonderfully refreshing atmosphere where the color of one's skin was irrelevant.

Part time jobs became a necessary part of financing my education, in addition to the ministerial and academic scholarships that paid most of the bill. The first year meant, after working in the school book store for a semester, working as a janitor's assistant at a nearby elementary school cleaning up the daily messes of the children each afternoon from 3:00 to 6:00 o'clock. Nothing is more humbling than this kind of work. After the first year, I moved on to work as a stock boy for West Pharmacy on the town square in Plainview for the remaining two years before graduation. The pay was better and the work not quite as distasteful.

The religion department became home to me. Dr. Howard and Dr. Bishop especially became mentors who taught me well in Greek, Bible, and religious studies. Other professors also were important influences. Dr. Neff instilled a love of English grammar, Dr. Dawson of history and other teachers as well. I enjoyed participating in a speech choir that taught me articulate pronunciation of words. Getting to present a senior paper at the national history honor society meeting at the University of New Mexico was a high point, and then to the Wayland student body in chapel afterwards. I did manage to play basketball on the junior varsity team until the need for a paying job took priority over sports. Serving as president of the student ministerial organization was helpful and opened the door to preach in numerous churches in the region. I managed to avoid getting caught up in some heretical teachings promoted by the university BSU director. But learned much through this experience.

Through all of these experiences the Lord was molding and shaping me for ministry both then and for the future. In June of 1964, Mr. West arranged for me a job interview with a huge medical distribution company in Ft. Worth. Thus soon after graduation we moved from Plainview to begin seminary studies in Fort Worth, already with a job lined up. Slide 6



The move to Ft. Worth provided the first real dilemma in ministry to me. I began preaching in area churches with some regularity that summer. In late summer, a small church near where I had grown up asked me to come as their pastor. But I didn't sense the leadership of God in this, so I reluctantly said no. Then in late September the pastor search committee from the Baptist church in <u>Graford</u> invited me to come in view of a call. This time a green light came from the Lord and so in the middle of the first semester another move -- from Ft. Worth to Graford -- had to be made. This was a church of about 75 people and the pastor 'lived on the field.' This began a four day a week 150 mile round trip each day to the seminary as a commuting student.

One of the very interesting aspects is that Graford had been our bitterest rival during my high school days at Perrin in the 1950s. Now I was to be the pastor of a few of my high school basketball rivals at Graford. We had lots of interesting conversations over the next four years while I was their pastor. The church had a reputation of being hard on pastors, and I well remember the previous pastor telling me soon after coming to the church, "Lorin, if you can pastor this bunch of folks, there's not a church in Texas that you can't handle!" I learned the truth of his words over the subsequent years. But, because I grew up in a very similar atmosphere at Perrin, I understood the people, while many of their 'city boy' pastors previously had no clue on how to relate. The next spring when one of the farmers in the community suddenly died, I volunteered to do the cotton planting for the several hundred acres that he had already contracted for. Little did I realize what an impact this would have across the community that this young Baptist preacher is out there running this huge tractor planting cotton for Mrs. Garvin, the widow lady. One of great challenges in ministry was being friend and pastor to a young Green Beret soldier who had a medical discharge after being severely wounded several times in combat in Vietnam. Joe and I spent many hours sitting on the shores of Possum Kingdom Lake in a remote spot where he could flush all the hurt, anger, etc. out of his system from suffering through Hell in Vietnam. I began stopping often in some of the 'beer joints' in Dark Valley west of Graford in order to minister to many who wouldn't darken the door of a church. I ended up baptizing a number of them in their conversion to Christ. Did the funerals of lots of these folks. Simple Slide 7 acts of kindness and compassion did much to open doors of witness and ministry. God was working!



During the four years pastoring at Graford, I also completed the Master of Divinity degree at <u>SWBTS in Ft.</u> <u>Worth</u>. A number of academic events significantly shaped the future for me. At the beginning of the second semester I was asked to become a grader and teaching assistant for Dr. Tom Urrey in the New Testament department. This being something ordinarily reserved only for doctoral students, I felt very honored to be asked to do this in my second semester of my master's studies. In the following fall, I switched over to work for Dr. Jack Mac-Gorman -- something that lasted from 1965 through 1973. My first experience of teaching a seminary master's class was the product of this, along with very deep personal friendships with members of the NT department. With lots of hard work and perseverance I managed to do the master's degree with close to a 4.0 GPA while serving as an assistant at the seminary and pastoring the church at Graford.

With graduation looming, in the winter of 1967 there came also keen interest in foreign mission service in Brazil. But the direction this seemed to be taking was theological education by extension (TEE), and this required a doctor's degree. I managed to qualify and gain acceptance as a doctoral student through the rigorous testing process at the seminary. But I wasn't sure that four or five more years of commuting from Graford was possible. In June of 1968, the <u>Springdale Baptist Church</u> in the Riverside area of Ft. Worth called me as senior pastor. I went from preaching to around 75 people each Sunday to a congregation of around 250 each Sunday. There was a church staff of four or five people to lead in an urban church in Ft. Worth. The next six years of leading this congregation became some of the happiest and most rewarding times of ministry ever. We managed to grow, do a massive building program, help another church merge into ours, and experience one of the most phenomenal spiritual awakenings I have ever observed. All this while Margaret and Ruth, secretaries at the church, helped me manage doctoral studies, teaching assistant work, and pastoring. We had wonderful ministry staff support as well, for youth, music, and education needs.

In January of 1974, a call came from the dean of the theology school at SWBTS offering me a teaching position on the faculty. Hesitantly I accepted and began that fall. Over the next 24 years I was a professor of Greek and NT gradually shifting my teaching to the PhD program. Two, year long sabbatical leaves at major universities in Germany provided me lectureship opportunities to teach in German at <u>Bonn</u> and <u>Heidelberg</u>. Also preaching in several <u>German Baptist churches</u> came along. Such things I never ever imagined happened. Slide 8



Within a short time after my going to the seminary as a professor, the Southern Baptist controversy erupted full force. The entire seminary came under attack from the right wing religious fundamentalists. The 80s and 90s were consumed with trying to fight off this religious cancer. My generation of faculty took a leading role in this fight at the seminary since most of the older generation could not believe that such people could ever take control of the seminary. The two years that I was on sabbatical leave at the university of Bonn (82-83) and the university of Heidelberg (90-91) were welcomed reprieves from the horrific tension and pressure at the seminary. In Germany, I was treated with such respect and esteem by Lutheran and Reformed Church professor colleagues as I had never experienced in the US. Because I paid the linguistic price of learning German well enough to give lectures to doctoral students, not only did I gain acceptance as a very atypical American, but the university of Bonn even offered me a lectureship on their faculty. Again it was not God's timing, which I sorely regretted.

In 1994, Dr. Dilday, the seminary president, was fired by the fundamentalist controlled trustee board. The days were numbered for those of us who had stood up to the corruption of the Gospel by these people. In June of 1997, a memo crossed my desk that a Baptist school in NC was looking for an entry level NT professor. I was far from that but felt moved to contact the chair of the religion department about the opening. Much to my surprise the school enthusiastically wanted Claire and I to come out for an interview. So in July we flew to NC and I was interviewed for the position as a full professor of New Testament and Greek at <u>Gardner-Webb University</u>. In October, I accepted their offer to begin in January 1998. We packed our belongings in mid December and moved to Boiling Springs, NC, a small town then of about 3,000 people plus nearly 3,500 university students.

January 1998 through December 2008 proved to be a wonderful life experience for both Claire and me. She landed a teaching position in a nearby town, and completed a master of library science degree as well. Although many adjustments came about in shifting from teaching PhD seminary students to undergraduate students, I had freedom to develop an extensive program of biblical Greek studies and to help develop a master's program in the religion department. I helped GWU develop its online teaching program. And cranfordville.com was born in 1999. The beauty of the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains was overwhelming and we both fell in love with the mountains. And for most of that 11 years, I taught an older men's SS class at the FBC, Shelby. Friendships were made then that continue till today.



Once we settled into life in small town USA, we began exploring the region with all its scenic beauty. At Christmas of 1999, Claire received her first Sony model alpha digital camera. Developing skills in landscape photography became her passion. We have an archive file of over fifteen thousand photos of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Gradually new and better cameras were added and we began doing photo sessions at weddings, important meetings etc. She was the main photographer and I did the technical side of editing and organizing the photos for clients.

For the first few years, Claire's schedule was very hectic with settling into teaching responsibilities and then shifting over to school librarian. This mandated a master's degree in NC school regulations. So she worked on a master's of library science degree at East Carolina State University, doing it online. Both daughters decided to move to NC and that brought some of the family close by in that they settled in the Asheville area some 70 miles west of Boiling Springs. One of our sons lived in the Washington DC area which was about five hours away from us. We enjoyed family get togethers reasonably often, especially at holidays.

<u>Cliffside Elementary School</u>, where Claire taught, was situated in an old mill town with a dying textile mill industry having been located there. Had it been in a large city, the school would have been an inner city type school. A large section of the three to four hundred school kids came out of poverty and thus suffered all kinds of issues. After becoming the librarian, Claire got to know all of the kids and very quickly became greatly loved and respected in the school. Although demanding, her work there was her ministry and mission to help these kids aspire to something greater than their present often troubled existence. We could hardly go shopping in the region without youngsters coming up to her for a hug and proudly wanting to introduce their teacher to their parents et als.

For a long time it seemed as though this would be our retirement home. We had bought a new home in Boiling Springs with this objective in mind. But as the years of the new century began unfolding, the work atmosphere in the NC public schools began deteriorating rapidly with a determined effort to dismantle public schools by certain politicians in the state. By 2007, we were beginning to think seriously about retirement.



Because of the prior experiences in Germany, I contacted a former student who now was executive secretary of the International Baptist Convention in Frankfurt Germany. We volunteered to help out IBC churches based in Europe in anticipation of a planned retirement in 2010. In April of 2008, Dr. Martin called me with a request. The <u>IBC church in Cologne Germany</u> had terminated a pastor, after catching him stealing funds from the church. Would we be willing to come over during the summer months in order to help the church get through this very difficult moment? We began praying about this request. Not much time existed before we would have to go, and a world of things would need to be done in advance. In early May, we called back to say we felt led to say yes although the funds for such a trip didn't exist and we had expired passports. In late April, I had asked the men's SS class to pray for us about what we were supposed to do. Just after telling Dr. Martin that we would try to arrange to come, the men told us that our travel expenses to Germany were covered. Dr. Martin indicated some scholarship funds to help with expenses while there could be arranged by the convention. The clincher was that our passports were renewed in barely one week. So June 15, 2008 we arrived in Frankfurt Germany and caught a train to Cologne. God had worked a true miracle in bringing everything together so quickly.

Bonn, some 30 kilometers from Cologne, I knew well from having lived there in 2002-2003. A group of ladies from the church met us at the train station and took us to the home of a Cologne policeman where we would stay for the summer. The next eight weeks would reshape the direction of our lives more than any other eight week period ever in our lives. The church, originally with about 125 members, had dwindled down to barely a dozen people. And virtually all these were African immigrants to Cologne. So Claire and I became pastor to a small Afro-German congregation struggling to stay alive. But God is in the business of making a difference. At the end of July, the church asked us to become their permanent pastor, and God gave the green light. That fall was spent back in NC wrapping up things in preparation for moving to Germany at the end of December.

Not only did God prosper the Cologne church with new members from over a dozen countries, but unbelievable funding flowed into the church to move it from 8,000 euros in debt to a 32,000 euros surplus by August 2010. Additionally, a Friday night Bible study group was begun in partnership with the German Baptist church in Bonn. Through my previous experiences and contacts in Germany, God opened unbelievable doors of ministry opportunity to this small English language church in Cologne. When we finished our two year commitment to the church in August 2010, the weekly attendance had grown to upwards of a hundred people.



In the spring of 2010, the demands for ministry in the Cologne church began overwhelming me, due to its rapid growth and expanded ministries. Pastoring an international church is totally unlike pastoring any national church anywhere in the world. The Cologne church needed now a young pastor with a lot more energy and stamina than I had at almost 70 years of age. But where to go? The cost of living in affluent Germany was considerably more than in the US. We began praying about God's leadership. We love the IBC convention and its ministry world wide with some 80 churches in almost 30 countries. In short, God provided another miracle in opening the door for us to continue serving IBC congregations but this time in Costa Rica. It's a large congregation with 500 to 600 people in attendance every Sunday morning and a full church staff. We moved to Santa Ana CR on September 1, 2010 into a nice condo just two doors down from the pastor and his family. We were there to help him and the church in any way they needed us.

Teaching an adult Bible class of a couple dozen people quickly was launched. This was followed by Personnel Committee responsibility. Membership on the Church Council came next. I helped launch a Wednesday evening program. And several other tasks, including membership on the church Junta. Claire became the church librarian and church photographer. The church grew from around 350 to nearly 600 during the five years of our time there. It was exciting to watch God at work in all this. It also became much more involved in the International Baptist Convention with our pastor serving as convention president in 2016. In the summer of 2013, a group from our church attended the annual summer retreat of the convention, which had been held in Interlaken Switzerland each July since the early 1960s. The group served as music leaders for the worship services mornings and evenings during the meeting.

I had been one of the Bible teachers at Interlaken since 2009 and we continued making these trips each summer through 2014 to teach two separate seminars each day of the retreat. One of the major vacation centers in all of Europe, Interlaken is in the middle of Switzerland in the midst of the stunningly beautiful Alps. So many friends from all over the world we made during those summers.

We became involved in the local life of Santa Ana as well, and especially Claire. Exercise classes, classes in the cultural arts center, making friends with local residents et als. It was a good time of ministry and witness. Our Spanish language skills progressed but not as well as did the German earlier. Learning a new foreign language in one's late 60s and 70s is much more difficult than in the teens and twenties. But



When contemplating where to go next, we sensed that a move back to Texas was probably the best choice. But where? A retirement community was the best option. Having known that many of my Wayland professors had moved to the Baptist one in San Angelo, we checked into this option. With the encouragement of Dr. Albert Reyes, the president of Buckner Ministries and a former student of mine, we made the decision to come to the <u>BRC at San Angelo</u>. It has been a challenging transition. Both Claire and I have been workaholics all of our adult lives. Slowing down the pace has been difficult at times. For me, perhaps more difficult with a really rapidly declining health that makes walking and doing much of anything physically almost impossible now. I inherited an extreme sensitivity to all kinds of medicines and the transitioning from the superior CR medicines to American medicines has been especially difficult and debilitating on my health. On Tuesday evening, Dec. 8, 2015, we arrived in San Angelo from Costa Rica to begin this new phase of our lives. Robert Morales made that transition into retirement life much easier with his help and encouragement here at the BRC.

One of my ongoing prayers has been to be able to continue doing ministry of some kind as long as I'm alive. A couple of decades ago, I began doing basic planning for retirement ministry. One part was to serve the Lord in ministry outside the US and especially in Europe. Another part was a continued writing ministry. By the retirement from my professorship in 2008, I had published almost two dozen books and journal articles in both English and German. Numerous former students encouraged me to put into writing the things they had learned in the classroom with me. The website cranfordville.com had been born in 1999 as a ministry to my GWU students to enhance the classroom presentations with supplementary materials online. As time progressed, I noticed unexpectedly that the outreach of cranfordville.com was expanding beyond my university students. This has mushroomed in retirement with the posting of Bible studies etc. As of about three years ago the outreach of cranfordville.com touched some 230,000 individuals world wide, as I accidentally discovered in doing some web searching. For the past few years about 600 to 700 individuals a month have come into the web site to check for materials. The Bible commentary series **Biblical Insights Commentary** was born before leaving NC and thus far about 5,000 to 8,000 pages of commentary materials have been produced on the NT. Now since I am barely able to leave our apartment, the majority of every day is spent working at the computer doing writing from the almost 48,000 volume digital library I have accumulated. I produce the graphic files also. If the Lord allows, Slide 13 I hope to finish a 12,000 to 15,000 page commentary on the NT by my passing.



What have I discovered over these past 75 plus years? One thing is certain: following God's leadership takes you into many unexpected places. Growing up in rural west Texas, I never ever even fantasized traveling to these places. In fact, I hardly knew that most of them even existed. The idea of delivering guest lectures to doctoral students in several of the German universities, that were among the most prestigious schools in the world, was certainly not contemplated. Gaining skills to read and interpret ancient texts in almost a dozen ancient languages, including publishing a grammar on ancient Koine Greek, was not in my mind either. Becoming a professor at one of the largest theological seminaries in the world was another not contemplated possibility. Nor, being asked to teach classical Greek in the University of Texas system nor being asked to be a guest professor in the sociology faculty at a large German university. At the beginning of Gospel ministry in high school during the late 1950s, my anticipation was to pastor small to moderate size Baptist churches in west Texas for the rest of my life.

When a life is turned over to the Lord with no strings attached, the future becomes an exciting adventure with God. That clearly has been my personal experience. And amazingly, ministry continues even in these closing years of the journey across earthly time. For that I am profoundly thankful to God.

From my early youth, the scripture in Proverbs 3:5-7 has been especially meaningful to me (NRSV):

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart,

and do not rely on your own insight.

6 In all your ways acknowledge him,

and he will make straight your paths.

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes;

fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

God has proven Himself faithful always to lead and guide in ministry in all kinds of places and situations.

On my gravestone will be inscribed the axiom that is found on the Scottish Presbyterian reformer John Knox's tombstone:

Here lies a man who so feared God that he dared not fear any man.