
MY STORY

from chaos to counseling



J.D. STAKE

as told to Tobin Perry

MY STORY

From Chaos to Counseling

J. D. STAKE

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Foreword

My dearest J.D.,

When I think back to how the two of us found each other 20 years ago, it's clear to me God was right in the middle of it from the beginning. I don't know anyone on earth I'd rather spend the rest of my life with than you. I know God put us together, and I'm so grateful he did.

You have touched so many people—including me—during these past 80 years. I've seen your life up close for the last two decades. I've spent time with the individuals you touched before you met me. I've spent time with your children. I've spent time with your grandchildren. I've met the clients that you've helped find wholeness and fruitfulness. I know you've impacted far more people than you realize.

I hope, as people read this book and reflect upon your life of serving others, they'll see this, too. It's tough to miss.

I'm praying for the future generations who will read this book. When we are no longer on this earth and our children get to go through all the boxes we've left behind in the attic, may they find enough clues and have enough memories to lead them to Jesus. Or as Steve Green says in his song, *Find Us Faithful*, "May all who come behind us find us faithful."

I've seen so many of those clues throughout your life—that lead people to Jesus today and I'm certain they will in the generations to come. For example, you are a remarkably compassionate man. I've seen your compassion in action toward me, your children, your grandchildren, and your clients. I've seen you show compassion to total strangers. You're always available to people who need your help. I don't know of any other professional who is as accessible to their clients as you.

I've seen you spend hours on the phone with them. But you do all of this without bringing your clients' problems home. You have an amazing ability to leave the clients' problems at the counseling office while still praying for their needs and being available if they call. Just ask anyone who knows you. Your compassion and care for others points people to Jesus regularly. I'm so grateful that I get to see it firsthand.

When we first met, I figured my opportunities to really make a difference through ministry were over. As a divorcee, I thought my chance to lead and teach women would be over. "Who would want to hear from me?" I thought. But you've always encouraged me to use my gifts for the Lord. It's been a remarkable privilege to minister alongside you in the churches and ministries where we've served. Not only have you never held me back, but you've been my biggest supporter. I can't easily express how grateful I am for that.

We've made great memories together over the last 20 years. I think of the ballroom dancing lessons we took. I think of all the great trips we've been on together. You've been such a fun travel companion. Whether we went to Hawaii, Steamboat Springs, Boston, New Orleans, or all of those trips to Hot Springs and Branson, we've had fun on each of them. I know you've always had the "travel bug." Thanks to you, I've caught it too!

Getting married was never just about us. From the beginning, we were bringing two families together. Although that certainly brought challenges at times, it has become a great source of joy, too. You've known that the way to a mother's heart is through her children. You've always cared for and provided for Jennifer and her family, just as you do for the boys. That has meant a great deal to me.

I have grown to love Jay, Jon, Joel, Kristi, Evie, and Van just like I love Jennifer, Chuck and Chandler. I don't think of them as "step-family" but a "bonus family."

I'll never forget that second Christmas after we were married. We had a big ice storm and had no electricity for several days. I re-

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member Jon cooking on the gas grill while standing in the freezing cold and even creating a make-shift oven to cook biscuits. We all enjoyed sitting around the living room, sharing stories by candlelight, and playing games on the kitchen table. It was so nice not to have any electronic distractions, and we all got to know each other a lot better.

We both know marriage is not easy. As a marriage counselor, you know that better than most. Looking back, I went into our marriage thinking that it would be a piece of cake. After all, I was marrying a marriage and family therapist! You had been married 36 years, and I had been married 26 years. What could possibly go wrong? But the truth is, we had never been married to each other. We had never blended a family before. You and I dealt with life, and especially conflict, differently because our families of origin were very different.

Remember the cards we both picked out for our first anniversary? Out of all the anniversary cards available on the market, we both chose the *same card* to give each other. The card pictured a roller coaster, which pretty much summed up our first few years of marriage. Of course, that card told the story of the early years of our marriage. The highs were very high, and the lows were very low. Obviously, over the years, we have developed a “mutually satisfying relationship,” and I am so thankful to have someone like you to grow old with.

At our wedding, one of the ministers, Stuart Bell, likened our relationship to that of Boaz and Ruth. I like that because it’s a story about loyalty and faithfulness. As with Boaz and Ruth, ours is not just a love story between the two of us, it is even more about God’s amazing love for all mankind, including me. For in your love, I found God’s provision and protection.

I’ll love you forever,

Linda

Searcy, Arkansas

June 2019

CHAPTER 1

Being Born & Being Born Again

You can't determine the most important days in your life until they're past. I certainly haven't been able to predict them. And that's true of the night 60 years ago that changed everything for me.

As I headed to the tent revival in Pensacola, Florida, where Alabama evangelist Bob Harrington was scheduled to preach on that cool, crisp December evening, I didn't know my life would forever change that day. I didn't realize I'd recount these events countless times over the next 60 years.

That night wasn't my first time at the nearly month-long revival. I attended several times the prior week. I knew I needed to hear the message that the 32-year-old preacher was sharing. Others I knew were coming to faith in Christ, "getting saved" as they called it. I was torn. I wanted to hear what he was preaching, but I desperately wanted to avoid going forward and making any kind of public decision.

You see, I had been busy ignoring God for years. I didn't have anything against God at the time. But as a 20-year-old Navy sailor, I guess you could call me an agnostic at this point. I believed in God, but I really didn't know much about him. Looking back now, I can see so many ways that God tried to show himself to me during those first 20 years, but I didn't pay much attention.

Things had started to change in recent months as I became friends with one of my fellow sailors, Bill Alley. He and his wife, Jo, had me and many of the other young single guys on base over to their house for Sunday morning breakfasts and then we'd go with his family to church.

During those few months in the fall of 1959, Bill had shared the gospel with me multiple times, usually using what I now know as the “Roman Road.” It was a pretty simple message. I was a sinner, lost and headed for an eternity without God, but God loved me so much that he sent his only son to die in my place. He explained to me multiple times what it meant to be born again.

By the time I headed to that revival in December 1959, I knew exactly what I needed to do. I just wasn’t ready to do it. I hadn’t stepped over the line yet. I liked Bill and his family. Though Bill had only recently become a Christian, he clearly was the “real deal.” He not only loved God, but he lived out his faith with integrity and humility. I knew he believed what he was telling me.

But I really didn’t want to listen. I realize now that the Holy Spirit was convicting me of my sin and showing me my need for Jesus. I knew God was calling me to take that next step. By this point, I knew exactly how to take the step. In my conversations with Bill and what I had seen as I had watched people walk the aisle and accept Christ at church the previous months, I knew the ball was clearly in my court.

That Sunday night I rode to the revival with my brother, Charlie, and a few other guys who worked on the line with me. The revival was held in a large circus-type tent. Probably a third of the attendees were Navy personnel stationed in the area. As Bob Harrington spoke, I listened to every word, yet I remember almost none of what he said. I knew God was compelling me to make my decision that night.

So, as the musicians played the invitation, I went forward and knelt at the altar. One of the counselors asked me if I knew what to do. Eventually, with his help, I prayed the sinner’s prayer. God saved my brother, Charlie, that night as well.

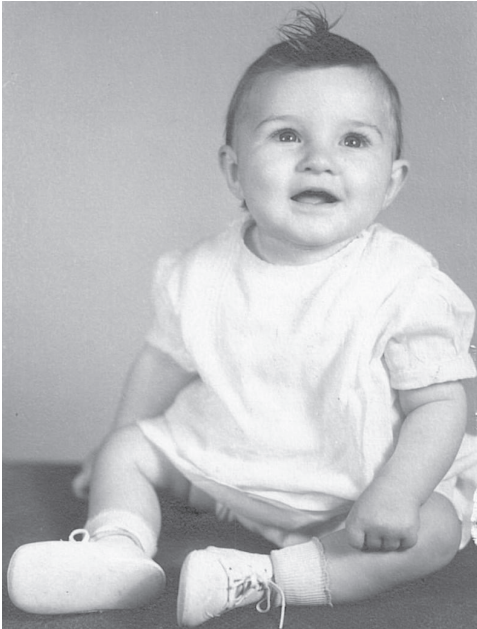
I didn’t grow up in a religious home and had probably gone to church more in the past three months than in my entire life put together up until that point. I certainly had no idea of everything that had transpired when God saved me that evening. I couldn’t have recited to you the doctrine of justification. I didn’t have any Bible verses

memorized.

But I knew this. I was a changed man. I was born again. And I've never been the same since.

My natural birth

When the country woke up on August 25, 1939, most Americans were greeted with some of the most impactful news of the 20th century. Europe was just days away from a war that would wreak havoc on the continent. A day earlier the British parliament had given the government broad powers to conduct war by passing the Emergency Powers Defense Act. War was coming to Europe. Then, two years later war came to the United States.



J. D. Stake (8 months) - April 1940



House where J.D. was born. Built by Josiah Stake. Josiah, Mable & Charles Stake on the porch steps.

Amid the news of a coming global calamity and a heavy hailstorm and tornado-like winds that had hit nearby Joplin, I made a relatively quiet entry into the world in Lebanon, Missouri. I was born in a home my grandfather, Josiah Stake, had built decades earlier. When it was

built, the stately, two-story place was likely one of the nicest homes in Lebanon. My dad, Charles Lester Stake, had grown up in the home, and my mom, Verna Aslee (Johnson) Stake moved in when they married two years earlier.

I know very little about my birth, except that my mom told me I was the prettiest baby she had ever seen. I was the first of six children for my parents. Some of the women from the ladies' auxiliary at the local First United Methodist Church gave my parents a vase full of flowers. After a lifetime of moves, that vase is one of the few heirlooms that survived my parents' 50 years of marriage.

My dad's dad was Josiah Stake, and my mom's dad was Van Doran Johnson. My parents named me Joe Doran Stake after the two of them. They couldn't decide what to call me on a day-to-day basis, so they settled on J.D. and occasionally Jade for short. I've been called J.D. ever since.

My family

Mom was five years older than Dad. She had graduated the eighth grade and went to work as a housekeeper for the superintendent of schools



*J. D. and his parents, Charles
& Verna Stake*

in Lebanon. The superintendent's house sat across the street from the local high school where my dad was a star athlete. Dad played football, basketball, and boxed.

Because my dad was so confident, my mom simply thought he was a smart aleck at first, but she also found him terribly good-looking. My mom was a looker, too. She had been dating a college guy at the time, but he was away.

It's clear from my perspective today that they were attracted to each other at a superficial level, because they weren't ideally suited for one another. They

came from two completely different family backgrounds. My grandfather, Josiah, had raised my dad, for all intents and purposes, as a single father. Josiah had been a pioneer in the Nebraska territory and a big cattleman. He had been widowed previously and was driving cattle into Kansas City to the stockyards with his sons when he met my grandmother, Hannah Mable Atfield. They married soon after that.

When my dad was 10, my grandparents divorced—a rarity in the 1920s. The divorce left Josiah bitter, and my father traumatized. Josiah had been wealthy before, but when my grandmother divorced, she cleaned him



*Hannah Mable (Atfield) Stake 1/16/1880
- 1/3/1962*



Josiah Stake
11/16/1864 -
6/12/1938

out of a small fortune. She left him with just a big, nice house and some property. Then came the Great Depression. My grandfather never recovered from this experience.

At first, my father lived with his mother, but that didn't last long. Eventually, he moved back in with his dad where he was left unsupervised throughout the rest of his adolescence. My dad's hopes to go to college and become a pilot were dashed through the divorce and the financial misfortune that followed.

Left to fend for himself through most of high school, Dad ran with a rough crowd. Always a good athlete, he was a Golden Gloves champion who majored in boxing rather than school. My mom fell hard for the good-looking, popular kid from the other side of the tracks.

Mom, on the other hand, was a country girl who had come from a stable, two-parent family. She idolized her own mother, Martha Rebecca (Vermillion) Johnson, a quiet, hard-working woman with a deep Christian faith. Growing up in the country, my mom had learned to garden on the farm and enjoyed it her entire life.

With such divergent backgrounds, my mom and dad had a combustible marriage from the start. In the early years of



Van Doran Johnson
12/27/1884 - 3/14/1974 and
Martha Rebecca (Vermillion) Johnson
3/4/1889 - 5/5/1955

their marriage, with my dad still active in boxing and a new baby two years after their nuptials, their relationship started off strong. My dad was an exceptional boxer during that time. Several times he fought on a Joe Louis undercard, but that was long before my time. My mom couldn't stand watching him box, though. He got cut easily and often bled profusely. He always said he gave up boxing because my mom couldn't take it.

But about four years into their marriage, everything fell apart. As his boxing days began to wane, my dad started drinking more heavily. My mom detested his drinking. Dad's drinking became the main source of contention in the household. Dad grew dark as he stewed on old resentments and the end of his boxing life. He resented his mom for leaving and taking his dad's money—and his future—with her, and he resented Mom for pushing him to quit boxing and for her refusal to go along with his drinking.

My dad was always a hard worker. I don't ever remember him being without a job, but he struggled to find a job that fit. As the resentments grew so did the drinking. As his drinking became more prevalent, Mom became more depressed and anxious.

My specific memories of their dysfunction and the chaos in our home began around the time I was in the first grade. I remember endless arguing and bickering. My dad would get angry and go out drinking. He left my mom at home to raise me and the two siblings I had at the time.

My mom was incredibly gentle, but she could be fiercely tough at times, too—particularly when it came to dealings with my dad. She could have a bad temper, particularly when provoked. At least three or four times, I can remember her emptying the kitchen cabinet, breaking every glass or dish in the house, in a fit of rage.

I remember several nights when I was about 7 or 8 when my dad would go out and drink and not come home at a time mom expected. Usually, he was drunk and had gotten into a fight. We had about five bars, or as we called them beer joints, in Lebanon. My mom would go

to each one of them looking for her husband. When Mom found out where he was, Dad was usually hiding in a backroom. When she came in, the barmaids would typically lie to protect him. I watched mom beat up several barmaids who tried to come in between her and her husband. Her reputation grew in the beer joints of Lebanon. Eventually, the owners wouldn't let my dad come into the bars because they were afraid Mom would beat up their barmaids!

One time my mom even had my dad put in jail. At the time, he was in the wholesale fuel oil business and was getting ready to leave in the fuel truck. My mom knew he had been drinking.

"If you get in that truck and drive out of here, I'm going to call the police, and have you arrested," my mom told him.

He dared her. So when Dad drove away, she called the police, and they pulled him over. It cost us quite a bit of money to get him out of jail. For years, when the two of them would get into an argument, he'd remind her of the time she called the police on him.

As the oldest child, I became a confidant for my mom. Although it would be several decades before I considered becoming a counselor, I consider my mom my first real "client" so to speak. From the ages of 10 to 15, I was her sidekick. I listened as she talked to me about my dad—and her dad (with whom she didn't have a good relationship). I would listen, ask a few questions, and try to encourage her (all components of a great counselor or coach).

She was always there for me to talk with, as well. An extremely good listener and empathetic, my mom made it her mission to care for her children. To her, we were her greatest accomplishment.

That's why the saddest memory I have of my first couple of decades of life was the year Mom wasn't around. I was 12 or 13 years old when my mom went into a sanatorium for a year because she had Tuberculosis. My aunt and uncle took care of us during that time. Aunt Nick and Uncle Howard Buttram were both good, decent people.

But I missed my mom. I was very depressed, anxious, and lonely. My dad still drank heavily during that period, and our relationship was

rockier than ever.

My mom always said my dad during this period was like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He had a good public persona. He was good-looking, had a good personality, and was well-liked in the community. When he was in a good mood, he was a lot of fun to be around. When he was in a bad mood, we had to stay clear.

I don't say any of this to disparage either of my parents. My dad had many good traits. Like I mentioned earlier, he was a hard worker with a terrific work ethic. He was honest, almost to a fault, and incredibly loyal. He knew how to handle money and always kept us out of debt.

My dad could also be incredibly compassionate, particularly in dealing with people who needed help. At one point, my dad and his half-brother, my uncle Myron, had a very prosperous oil business, called Stake Brothers Oil Company. They were wholesalers and had some retail filling stations. They supplied oil to hundreds of people in the Lebanon area. Many of these people were poor, and my dad often gave fuel to people who didn't have money to pay. When he got out of the fuel oil business, he had thousands of dollars in unpaid credit.

My dad had retired as a boxer before I was old enough to remember much of his life in the ring, but I did get to see my dad spar in the ring once. My dad was still in his 30s and in good shape, but clearly not in good enough shape to take on this young contender named Red. The two started out sparring, but it didn't take long before my dad tagged him with a left hook and a full-fledged fight broke out. Everyone enjoyed it because my dad held his own. The fight ended when my dad caught him with a good right, knocked him down, and almost knocked him out. For years afterwards, people in town would come up to my dad and say, "Remember the night you knocked Red on his butt?"

Years later, my dad would turn his life over to Christ and become a faithful church member—and those difficult years back in Lebanon would simply be trophies of God's grace.

My early school days

Until we moved away from Lebanon after the 8th grade, my cousin Sue and I were particularly close. Even though she was only a few months older than me, I always felt she was much wiser. I typically tagged behind her wherever she went.

But together we could be quite mischievous. In fact, we started off our first day of first grade in trouble. At the time, we didn't have a kindergarten, so this was our first day of our schooling career.

We were in the registration line, and a little boy was standing in front of us. The teacher doing the registering said, "Why don't all of you just have a seat at one of the little tables?" When this little boy got ready to sit down, we pulled the chair out from under him. He missed the chair, fell on the floor, skinned his back and started crying. So, the first day of school, even before registration was finished, Sue and I found ourselves in timeout in the corner.

My school career didn't get much better. I never had much interest in school. My favorite subject in elementary school was art. I remember winning a blue ribbon at a little art show for a red-headed woodpecker. It wasn't that good, but I sure enjoyed creating it.

Before we left Lebanon after grade school, we moved around frequently. My dad always worked, but sometimes he had jobs that didn't pay well. We moved frequently to cut costs. Three times we moved from the city limits of Lebanon to about 10 to 15 miles outside of town. Each time we moved into shacks that didn't have indoor plumbing, electricity, or running water.

During my fifth- and sixth-grade years, when we lived out in the country, I attended a one-room schoolhouse—complete with an outhouse and a wood-burning stove to keep us warm. Called Candock School, it was one of many one-room schoolhouses in Laclede County at the time.

My early spiritual journey

For the first 13 years of my life, I had few spiritual influences on

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my life. Except on special occasions, neither of my parents attended church. I never remember going to church with either of them prior to high school. I must have gone to a wedding or a funeral at a church during that time, but I don't remember it. I heard bits and pieces about religion during this time, but it was mostly as criticism. My dad was a born skeptic, but he didn't say much about church. My mom liked to point out the hypocrites in the community who went to church but didn't live like it the rest of the week.

The one Christian I knew during this time was my maternal grandmother, Grandma Johnson. Although she was very devout, she was also quiet and reserved about her faith. I don't remember anyone witnessing to me or even mentioning Jesus to me until we moved to Arkansas.

Looking back now, I wouldn't have had any kind of theology at the time, just some vague notions about who God was. I didn't think much about spiritual matters. The one exception came when a young playmate died when I was about eight. My brother Charlie, my friend Orley, and I had been cleaning out a chicken coop when we picked up some kind of infection that settled into our lungs.

All three of us were sick, but Charlie and Orley's illness was clearly worse than mine. Charlie nearly died. Orley did die. I prayed so hard for Orley and Charlie during that time. It was the first time I ever called out to God.

I know now that God was indeed at work in my life during this period. In retrospect, I can see how God was using the difficult moments of my young life to give me a glimpse of who He was.

But as of then, I just wasn't listening.

All of that was about to change.

CHAPTER 2

Moving to Searcy

Everyone I knew and everything I cared about was in Lebanon, Missouri, when I completed the 8th grade in 1953. Lebanon had been a dark place, full of beer joints and temptations for my dad. Like I mentioned earlier, I rarely, if ever, heard about Jesus and certainly had little introduction to the gospel.

But, in the middle of my eighth-grade year, when my parents told me and my two siblings that we were moving five hours away to Searcy, Arkansas, I was devastated. My dad had been working for the Railway Express Company, as their number two or three man in Lebanon. But the company offered him the top job on the Missouri-Pacific Railway in Searcy.

The job would mean more money and opportunities for my dad, but I didn't want to hear anything about it. I didn't want to leave my grandparents, my mother's parents. Grandma and Grandpa Johnson's home had been a refuge for me throughout my sad early years.

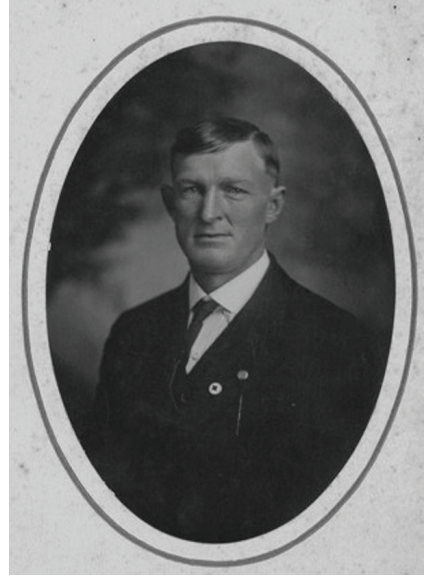
My grandfather had become one of my early mentors. I spent a



*J.D. at his Grandpa Johnson's
farm*

lot of time with Grandpa Johnson on his farm, particularly during the summer. Up until that time, Grandpa Johnson had been somewhat of an outlaw type. He was a horse-and-cattle trader and a farmer. God saved him shortly after we moved to Searcy, but when I knew him, he was in his drinking, raising hell, cussing days.

Despite his hell-raising tendencies, my grandpa was a very principled, hard-working man. He believed in telling the truth. He took pride in being honest. He believed in self-reliance—and told great stories along the way. Grandpa Johnson was a lot like my dad and the two got along great. Maybe that's part of what attracted my mom to my dad. They were both



Grandpa Johnson

about the same size, small guys who were tough.

The thought of leaving my grandparents, my cousin Sue, my friends from sports, school, and scouts weighed heavily on me as I wrapped up my eighth-grade year. At 13, I felt like I was losing everything. I had never been very secure in my parents' relationship. I always feared it could end at any time. So going off some place new with my mom and dad—without my grandparents—seemed scary.

I found out I was leaving about three months before the actual move. I was in denial for much of that time. Then I became very upset and very verbal about my displeasure with leaving. I even threatened to run away if they made me move.

Of course, all of this frustrated my dad. He was constantly on my case and threatening me during this time. I said from the beginning that I wanted to stay in Lebanon with my grandparents. I think my parents, or at least my dad, may have even considered it for a time.

But my mom wouldn't go along with it. I would go to Searcy with the rest of the family. The case was closed.

Our new home

My dad moved to Searcy a few months before the rest of us so he could start his new job. We waited until school was over for the rest of us to make the move. By that time, I had three siblings. Charlie was 11, Becky was 9, and my new baby brother, James had just been born.

I rode to Searcy with two of my uncles, whom I didn't know that well. All in all the move was the most traumatic event of my young life. I felt like anything good that I had accomplished in Lebanon had been erased forever with the move.

Fortunately, it didn't stay that way for long. Like what often happens with 13-year-old angst, my fears were largely unfounded. I made friends quickly in our neighborhood. They remain my friends today, 65 years later. As it turned out, within a year, I was happier in Searcy than I had ever been in Lebanon. The next four years would become the happiest of my life up until that point.

I attribute some of that to Searcy itself. Although Searcy and Lebanon were both about the same size, about 5,000 in population at the time, they couldn't be more different. Searcy was a clean town. That was the town motto. A Church of Christ college strongly influenced the town in a positive way. There were large Churches of Christ, a large Methodist church, and a large Baptist church in town. Both the Methodist and Baptist church had large, active youth groups. Most of the schoolteachers were Christians. Searcy had a large Christian community. It seemed like everyone went to church. Our typical, Southern town of the 1950s, Searcy had little crime and almost no mischief.

But maybe the most important change for us when we arrived in Searcy was that it was a "dry county," where the sale of alcohol wasn't allowed. My dad didn't have access to alcohol. His boss was a strong Christian man and a good influence on him.

My dad virtually gave up drinking at that point. Alcohol had been

a part of his social environment. The guys he grew up with in Lebanon had been drinkers. They supported him when he was boxing. I don't think Dad liked drinking in the first place. It made him sick to drink. Looking back, I think he may have been allergic to it. For him, drinking was a social outlet, something he could do with his friends.

When we moved to Searcy, he left all of that behind. Suddenly, when it was just my dad, my mom and his work associates (who were largely good influences upon him), he made a complete change. Now in his early 30s, Dad began to settle into life as a family man.

My siblings

Of course, that changed the entire home atmosphere. Without the pull of alcohol, my dad got along better with my mom. I felt much more secure with their relationship and my place in the family. That didn't just mean better relationships with my parents, but now free from some of the earlier stresses, even my siblings and I grew closer together.

My brother Charlie and I were two years apart and had always been nearly inseparable. Until I graduated from high school, we did just about everything together. We looked out for each other. We had each other's back. We also shared just about everything. We even shared a bed until I graduated high school.

Charlie was a good athlete who played football, basketball, and ran track. We always enjoyed playing sports with one another and cheered each other on from the sidelines when necessary.

My sister, Becky, was four years younger than me. I always tried to look out for her. She became a big help to my mom, who had her fourth child when I was 13 and had two more in the two years after that.

J. D. STAKE



Charles & Verna Stake, James, Jon, Joan, J.D., Charlie, Becky

With the births of James, John, and Joan in the years right before and right after the move to Searcy, my parents had a second family. Our parents would often leave the three younger kids with us older ones when they went out. There were three of them and three of us—two older boys and a girl and two younger boys and girl. We each kind of had our counterpart. The six of us have remained close. We still take trips together and usually get together in some way each year.



*Charles Lester Stake 1/13/1919 - 12/8/1988
& Verna Aslee (Johnson)
Stake 11/7/1913 - 7/3/2003*

My teenage years

Searcy was a great place to be a teenager in the 1950s. If you think of the clean and wholesome impression of the 1950s, that was us in Searcy. Baseball was still America's pastime, and every summer, you could find kids outside playing it. In the winter months, most of the activities centered around the schools. Plus, all the kids I knew went to church, where they participated in Vacation Bible School and the regular fall revivals.

We had a Teen Town in Searcy with sock hops and dances that were all well-chaperoned on Friday and Saturday nights. We were crazy about Elvis and Carl Perkins. James Dean was also big. When "Rebel Without a Cause" came to our theater in 1955, all the guys wore red jackets with their collars turned up, along with slicked-back Elvis-type hair.

Many of my friends also enjoyed hunting, fishing, and camping. I never got into hunting and only fished occasionally while I was growing up. During my junior year, I worked part time at the Rialto Theater.

As teenagers go, we were a relatively wholesome group in Searcy. The entire time I was in high school I didn't know anyone who used marijuana or prescription drugs. Occasionally, someone would drive to a neighboring wet county and buy beer, but that was very rare.

I didn't pay much attention to school as a teenager, and one of my major vices was skipping school at the time. My favorite experience skipping school happened during my junior year when we found out that Elvis was scheduled for a concert at Robinson Auditorium in Little Rock. My friend and I enlisted three girls to go with us.

Robert had access to a nearly new car, a '54 Ford—just two years old in 1956. It was a coupe, so we drove with two in the front and three in the back. The five of us had the time of our lives. We had to wait for the concert to start. Elvis was coming from Memphis and was running behind. He started just as soon as he got there. When his band got set up, the lights came on and he introduced his famous song, "Hound Dog." The place went crazy. It was the first time he had ever played the

song publicly.

As I moved into high school, I started dating for the first time, too. Usually that meant going to school dances, movies, and church events. Searcy was built on a court square. After the boys took their dates home, we'd meet up on the court square. Two of our friends who were policemen would watch the square. Occasionally, we'd sneak into the municipal pool and have a late-night swim. The police would make an effort to get us to leave, but it was more of a game for them. Catching us was the prize, not prosecuting us.

Those times of sneaking into the municipal pool weren't my only run-ins with the police during my high school days though. I generally was one to follow rules and regulations, but I did have a mischievous side. During the summer between my junior and senior year, my friends and I stole some watermelons out of a truck. We went to the top of the VFW building on the Court Square, right in the middle of town, and tossed the watermelons onto cars, mostly of people we knew. Unfortunately, one of our classmates had just gotten a brand-new Pontiac, a two-door hardtop. One of the watermelons went into one of the rolled-down windows and splattered all over the inside of that new car.

All we ended up getting out of the incident was a ticket. One of my friends' parents had a lot of political clout. He talked to the judge, so they decided to bring us all to court and scare us. We didn't get fined and nothing went on our record. We just had to pay to clean up the car.

I met my first real girlfriend not long after arriving in Searcy. She was "Miss. Everything" when I got there. She was a cheerleader, a junior homecoming queen, and attended First Baptist Church. In my eyes, she was beautiful.

But she had a boyfriend, whom she had been with since the first grade. He wasn't particularly attentive though, so I made my move on her. He threatened to beat me up and pushed me around a few times. That ended pretty quickly though. My girlfriend turned on him. I actually became friends with him later.

My girlfriend's dad was a deacon at the First Baptist Church, and he was completely against her dating me. We both played basketball, and she was a cheerleader, so we rode the bus together to away games. Although her dad didn't want us dating, he made a deal with us. If I went to church on Sunday, I could date his daughter the following Friday or Saturday night without much hassle. I was more than willing to abide by that rule.

God keeps calling me

Going to church with my girlfriend was the first sustained spiritual influence in my life. At First Baptist Church of Searcy, I heard the gospel and understood for the first time what it meant to be lost. Unfortunately, I was still confused about the gospel though. I heard my friends talk about getting saved, and I didn't really know what it meant.

I had friends in grade school who were Pentecostals, and they frequently talked about being saved and then lost again. I didn't really understand what it meant to be saved and secure in a relationship with God. I was afraid I'd die and go to Hell. I knew I needed to be saved. I knew if something happened to me, I was headed for Hell.

I remember living under a cloud of misunderstanding and fear. I was so confused about the gospel and how to escape the penalty of Hell that I denied what was going through my mind and tried to stay clear of spiritual conversations. When people started talking to me about getting saved, I found a reason I had to be elsewhere.

But God surrounded me with good testimonies and good Christian kids who showed me what it looked like to follow him. Take, for example, Ruth Smith. She was an honor student and a good Christian girl. Every time I had a chance, I tried to cheat off of her paper, but she'd never let me. She would tell me about Jesus though. I still remember her attempts to witness to me during that time.

Cheating was my attempt to hide a lack of academic success in high school. It wasn't that I couldn't do the work. I just didn't care

about school. I did just what I needed to get by. I used to say, “I’m in the half of the class that makes the top half possible.” And that was true. I had mostly C’s and D’s—except for straight A’s in Physical Education. Other than P.E., I don’t believe I got an A or a B in any other class.

During my senior year, I even got expelled, but it had nothing to do with my struggling academics. I was sitting in an assembly next to one of our cheerleaders, Julia. In the midst of a breakdown, she was shaking hard. I asked her what was wrong, and she said, “Just slap me.”

So I did.

That was a big mistake. A teacher grabbed me from behind and whisked me off to the principal’s office. I told my principal what happened, but he didn’t believe me. When he asked Julia what happened, she was scared she would get in trouble and denied ever telling me to slap her. When the principal called my dad, he didn’t believe me either. Only my mom believed my account of the story.

I got expelled from school and didn’t get vindicated until my 10-year reunion. Julia, who had become a psychiatric nurse, confessed to what she did and even told the principal, who was there at the reunion.

Basketball, my relief

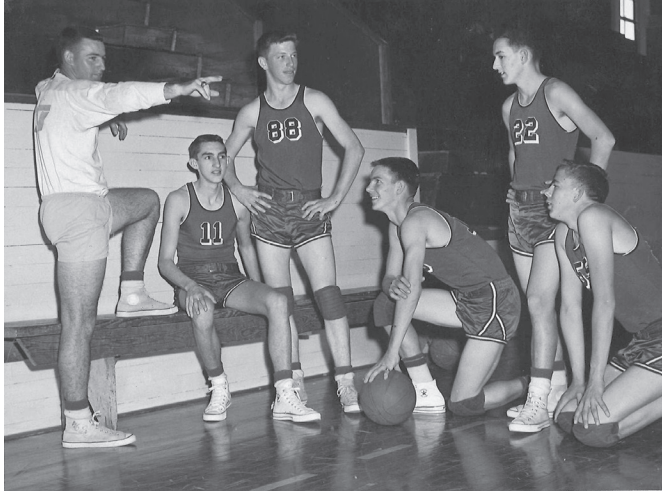
My biggest concern with academics was to stay eligible to play sports. I played basketball, baseball, football, and ran track in high school. But my true love was basketball.

I played basketball competitively from sixth grade on. While we still lived in Lebanon, my basketball days helped me deal with much of the anger and resentment building up with my dad.

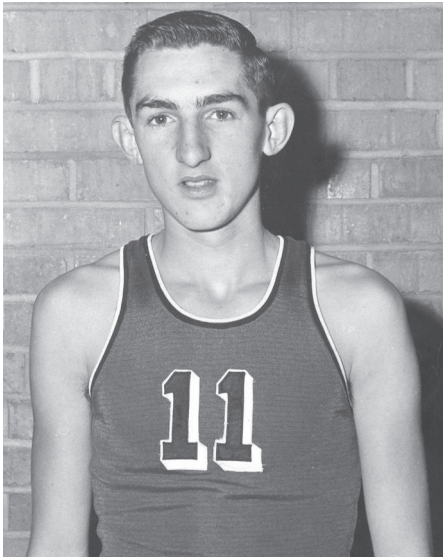
It really didn’t matter if I was playing for my school or in a pickup game with my buddies. I’d play any place I could find a goal. While I made our grade school team in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, I wasn’t a starter until the eighth grade. By that year, I had grown, and my skills had matured. The other guard was our best player. I was the point guard and focused on making assists and playing good defense on the other team’s best player.

MY STORY

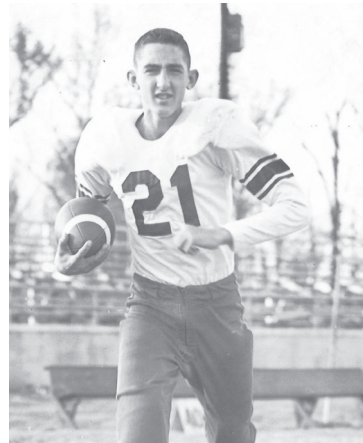
I made another big jump in skills when I went from the eighth grade in Lebanon to the ninth grade in Searcy. I was a starter by the end of my first year in high school in Searcy. I was still a point guard who focused on making good passes and strong defense.



SHS Starting Five 1957. Coach Womack, J.D. Stake, Homer Wilson, Jimmy Don Jackson, E.D. Yancey, Randall Gay



J.D. Stake, SHS Senior. All-County '57, All-District '57, Co-Captain



SHS Junior Fall '55

In fact, my early prowess at sports led to resentment from some of the boys who had lived in Searcy all their life. Searcy, like Lebanon, was the kind of town where everyone knew everyone. I was the new guy who was getting all the attention and got bullied a bit from my peers for it. The upperclassmen particularly rode me hard.

Part of what made basketball so special for me growing up is that I looked up to my coaches. I didn't have great coaches in the other sports I played, but my junior high and high school basketball coaches were great mentors for me. Both had played college sports. They were good Christians, who witnessed to me from time to time.

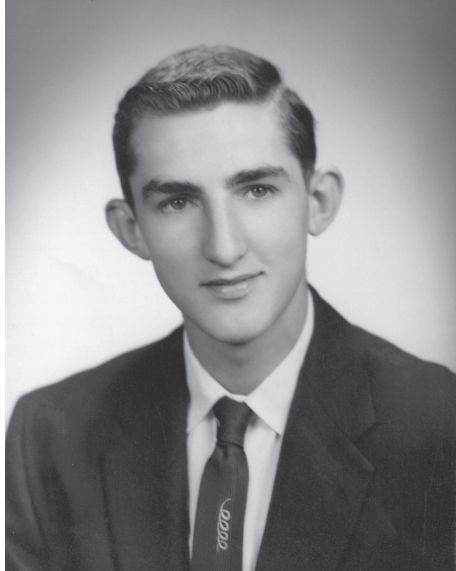
In a small way, those two coaches helped me take my first steps toward counseling. I admired both of them and wanted to be more like them. I started to see myself as a coach someday, following in their footsteps. I didn't have the grades to get into college at the time, but that didn't stop me from considering the possibility of coaching someday. That interest in coaching eventually found fulfillment in a career as a counselor.

CHAPTER 3

Heading into the World

When I graduated high school in the spring of 1957, I knew my grades wouldn't get me into college anywhere. I had just barely graduated. My parents didn't have enough money to send me to college either. That meant I needed a job. I wasn't sure exactly what to do next. I still wanted to coach someday, but I would need to figure out a way to get into college to make that happen.

My mother's youngest brother, Uncle John Johnson, owned a construction company in Lebanon that built farm-to-market roads. He agreed to give me a job and teach me how to be a heavy-equipment operator. After years of hanging around car lots and working on cars, I was already a good backyard mechanic. It seemed like a natural transition to my uncle's construction company where he'd keep an eye on me and keep me out of trouble.



SHS 1957 Graduate

Uncle John was a hard-working Christian, someone who professed faith in Christ but whose life didn't always match that belief. I didn't pay much attention at the time, but now I realize he wasn't really living for the Lord. He liked to tell dirty jokes and talk trash. It wasn't a great

environment for a young kid just out of high school.

Even though I had a job and worked hard for my uncle, I wasn't headed in the right direction. Frankly, I wasn't headed anywhere. That first winter in Lebanon was a tough one, and we didn't work much. I spent my days hanging around the pool hall. When the following May came around, I socialized more. It had only been four years since I had left Lebanon, so I looked up old friends. Most of them were still around. In fact, most of them were going nowhere, too. We'd play pool and drink beer. Since some of the kids were underage, a couple of my friends and I began buying beer and reselling it to younger kids in Lebanon.

One night we got caught by the Missouri Highway Patrol. All of us were drinking. They took us down to the police station and booked us. My grandparents interceded with the judge who gave us an option to go to court on the charges or enlist in the military.

I chose the latter. Two of us chose to join the Navy rather than face the court for our misdeeds. At the time, it was referred to as DA probation. They charged you and then agreed to put the charges on the shelf if you agreed to their terms. They wouldn't prosecute you, and you'd have a clean record. You got a second chance in the Navy.

Back in Searcy I had been attending church off and on, and despite a few mischievous acts, I had lived a pretty straight and narrow life in high school. When I was taken to jail for selling alcohol to minors, I felt a strong sense of conviction. I felt bad for what I had done. I knew I had disappointed my parents and grandparents.

At this stage of my life, I was eager to get out of Lebanon and do something with my life. I knew if I stayed in Lebanon and stuck with the same set of friends, my life would go downhill. I felt worthless and hopeless about my prospects for the future.

I started to formulate a new plan for my life as I prepared to go to the Navy. I still wanted to coach someday. With a stint in the Navy, college was possible thanks to the G.I. Bill. I figured if I did everything I was told in the Navy, I could make something out of my life.

The Navy was the fresh start I knew I needed. It was my chance

to start over.

My Navy experience

I had already demonstrated quite a bit of mechanical aptitude, so as I looked toward the Navy, I quickly went the direction of aircraft mechanic. While at the recruiter's office in Lebanon, I took a test of mechanical aptitude that allowed me to go into a program that started me out as an E-2 rather than an E-1 and get a head start as an aviation mechanic. When my parents dropped me off at the St. Louis train station and I



J.D. Stake. US Navy 1958 – 1963

headed off to the Navy in May of 1958, I felt a new excitement about my future. I had a plan, and I was determined to make the most of the opportunity the Navy was giving me.

I had been a good athlete, so I went to boot camp in Great Lakes, Illinois., in good physical condition. Because I had served as the captain of my high school team, I already had some strong leadership skills. I knew how to organize and delegate. Right away, I was picked as one of the leaders of a platoon of five or six other young men. I even started reading and studying to make up for all the goofing off I had done in high school.

After boot camp, I went to Norman, Oklahoma., where the Navy had its aviation prep school and they taught me general Navy aviation. My Uncle Myron and my Cousin Sue had moved there, so we were able to reconnect after four years apart. Sue and I double-dated a few times and did things that 18-year-olds did during those days.

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J. D. STAKE



J.D. Stake USS Antietam Sea-Air Rescue Squadron



J.D. Stake & Charlie Stake. Ellyson Field, Pensacola 1959

Eventually, I moved again. This time I headed to Pensacola, Florida, where I attended helicopter school. From there I went to A-school, where I learned to work on helicopters, jet engines and stuff like that. In total, I was in school for close to two full years.

By this point, my entire attitude about school had changed. I studied hard in both leadership training and mechanical training. Each time I graduated in the top part of my class. In two years, I had gone from a lackadaisical high school senior to someone determined to learn everything I needed to know to succeed.

But I didn't just go to school during that time. I still had other duties, like calling roll and marching with students to school in the morning. I supervised the dorm and held inspections.

Plus, we had plenty of opportunity for recreation and sports while in the Navy. Many of the other young men serving in the Navy enjoyed the EM Club, where they could get a pitcher of beer for just a quarter. But I stayed away. I had seen my grandfather and my father struggle with alcohol. In Lebanon, it was obvious I was going down the same path. Even before I had spiritual convictions about alcohol, I became a teetotaler. And, like many other teetotalers, I could be rather obnoxious about not drinking.

My journey toward faith

During my time in Pensacola at helicopter training, I had duty on the flight line. We were training helicopter pilots. I was involved in both training and maintenance, which included flying and rescuing downed pilots.

That's when I met Bill Alley. He was a junior petty officer, who took me under his wing while I was there. He started inviting me and a couple of other guys to his house for Sunday morning breakfast and then to church. Bill was very friendly and what I'd call a "go-getter." He was the kind of guy the rest of us enjoyed hanging out with.



Bill & Jo (left) Alley and other family members

Like I mentioned earlier, Bill was a new Christian who was particularly bold about sharing his faith. He witnessed to me frequently, usually using a method I now know as the Roman Road, a series of verses in Paul's letter to the Romans that gives the basics of how someone can have a personal relationship with Jesus.

I didn't go to church with Bill and his wife, Jo, every week because I often had Sunday morning responsibilities on base. But I went as often as I could. I heard the pastor preach regularly about sin and every person's need to accept what Jesus did on the cross as payment for that sin. I now see, in retrospect, that God was convicting me of my sin. I began feeling guilty for the sin in my life. Although I had made a pretty remarkable transformation from my days in Lebanon after high school to my life in the Navy, I knew I was not where I should be. Though I certainly wouldn't have used the word at the time, I knew I was lost. At church in Searcy, I had clearly learned that I was a sinner. I knew I needed to be born again. I knew that I needed more than good intentions. But I was confused as to how I would make such a decision.

In the fall of 1959, I was beginning to get a clearer picture of what I needed to do to get saved, thanks to Bill, my Bible reading, and what I was learning at the Baptist church where I attended.

Part of what kept me from making a decision for Christ was how churches did evangelism in the 1950s. Other than Bill, hardly anyone had ever laid out the gospel to me in any kind of personal invitation. Instead, I was told I needed to “come forward” during a public worship service and make a profession of faith.

I grew up with somewhat of an inferiority complex. Now, I connect the complex with my relationship with my dad, who was frequently critical of me. I feared making a public spectacle of myself. I never wanted to bring much attention to myself. I liked hanging around with friends, not being the sole focus of everyone else’s gaze.

When Bill first invited me to attend the revival led by Bob Harrington in November and December of 1959, I initially attended just to satisfy him. He had been so kind to invite me into his home as often as he did. I didn’t really want to be around preachers any more than I had to. I didn’t want to face the conviction. In recent weeks I had even lied to people who asked point-blank whether I was saved. I just didn’t want to have the conversation anymore.

I went to the revival a few times that first week. I enjoyed being around my friends and spending time with Bill on the nights he was there. Throughout this time, the conviction kept growing more intense. I knew I needed to go forward. I began noticing preachers and other people saying, “Jesus is not ashamed of you. You shouldn’t be ashamed of Him.” Eventually, the old shame didn’t seem to matter. I stopped caring what other people thought. Some of it simply was maturity and growing out of the obsessive focus on other people’s opinions. I also believe part of it was the Holy Spirit. He had been at work in my life for years.

So on that night in December of 1959, I finally got out of my chair in the tent and made my way to the front. After I told the counselor exactly why I came forward, he led me in a simple prayer to accept Christ. Then the counselor told me that when I got back to church to make a profession of faith, tell the preacher I was saved and submit to baptism. That became the most emotional part of the process. I still cringed at

the thought of going forward and making a profession in front of Immanuel Baptist Church, where I had been attending in Pace, Florida.

The next night, at Immanuel, I knew what I had to do. The whole night I tried to back out. I kept telling myself I'd go forward another night. I needed to think this through some more.

But, at the end of the service, the pastor gave a compelling invitation to the young men who had made professions of faith at the revival. He asked us to come forward and acknowledge our profession of faith and submit to baptism. I waited until the service was completely over and the benediction had been pronounced, but I couldn't wait any longer. An emotional urge gripped me in the back row of that church, and I jumped up and said, "Wait, wait. I need to make a profession of faith."

Everyone stopped on their way out as I walked to the front and told the preacher I had accepted Christ and wanted to be baptized. It was an emotional night as I stood up there and hugged people as they made their way out of the sanctuary. It wasn't like me to get emotional, but it also wasn't like me to jump up in front of everyone to profess my faith in Christ.



*Baptism Day December 1959. Kenny McNutt, Charlie Stake, J.D. Stake,
Gary Grissom*

MY STORY

Since our church didn't have a baptismal pool, Charlie and I were baptized at our parent church, First Baptist Church of Milton, Florida. I was one of about 10 who were baptized that night.

Ironically, I had held off accepting Christ for months, if not years, because I didn't want to make a spectacle, but I ended up making a very big spectacle of myself the night I finally gave my life to the Lord. That night I felt like it was my last chance. I knew God had given me opportunities to accept Christ for years, and I hadn't done it. I thought if I said no that night, I was done. It wouldn't happen. I was out of chances.

It was a pivotal moment of my life. I have never been the same since.

CHAPTER 4

A Whole New Life

I've long told people that the second most important decision you'll ever make—after your decision to follow Jesus—is your choice of a spouse. Much of what you do in life is defined by who you marry. Difficult marriages will change the trajectory of your life. They will wreak havoc on your life. As a marriage and family counselor, I've seen it happen over and over again.

That's why, five months after I decided to follow Jesus, I'm grateful I met the woman with whom I'd spend 36 years of marriage.

The Navy had just stationed me in New Iberia, Louisiana., after a brief stint in Memphis. Right after I checked into the naval air station, I received my room assignment and unpacked. The first person I met, Dewey Painter, invited me to join him at Trinity Baptist Church.

Some people believe life is random—that there is no purpose or plan to what happens in your life. I've never believed that. In my life, I've seen just the opposite to be true. I think about that seemingly random meeting with Dewey. My entire life—from whom I married to my future career path — changed because of that connection. God ordered those steps. It had nothing to do with chance.

I was a new Christian at the time. I had only been following Jesus for six months, but I was growing. I went with Dewey that day to visit his church. While I was there, he introduced me to a group of young people who were part of the congregation. One of the girls I met in May of 1960 was a tall, thin, beautiful young college girl who captured my attention from the start.

MY STORY



Gloria Jean Lacy 12/31/1940 - 4/30/1998

Jean would later say that for her, it was love at first sight. She felt like God told her that day that I would be her future husband. She didn't show her interest right away, because she had just broken up with her high school boyfriend and wasn't immediately ready for another relationship. I can't say I figured that out immediately, but it sure didn't take long.

Jean had grown up at Trinity Baptist Church. Her mother was a Sunday School teacher, and a bilingual French Louisiana Cajun. She would teach Sunday School lessons in Cajun French.

Her dad, who was half Cherokee, had been a World War II veteran and was now a salesman. In his younger days, he played basketball at the University of Oklahoma (when students still played on a dirt floor). He also served for a time in the Oklahoma state legislature.

Jean and I went on a double date the month after we met. Actually, it was more complicated than that. We were supposed to have

three couples: one sailor and his girlfriend, Jean, another sailor and a girl, and myself. The other single sailor and I had to flip a coin to see who got to take Jean out.

Fortunately, I won—another seemingly random event that I believe God faithfully orchestrated.

For the first few dates, I'd pull up outside her house and she'd get out of the car and walk to the front door. Then she'd reach inside and flip the lights on. That went on for a while. I would have given her goodnight kisses along the way, but she avoided them.

After about five to six dates, I pressed the issue. I asked her if I could kiss her goodnight. She flatly told me no. She told me she wouldn't even consider kissing someone until they were engaged.

That seemed crazy to me. I thought to myself, "If she thinks I'm going to get engaged just to get a kiss, she's wrong!"

Then I decided to open my mouth.

"There are plenty of girls in this town who would love to be going out with me," I said in anger.

"Good. Go find one," Jean said as she went in the house and slammed the door behind her.

It was our first fight.

I didn't see her for another two weeks. I had weekend duty the following weekend, so I missed her at church. We didn't have cell phones in those days to stay in touch. When I saw Jean again, she told me we needed to talk. We went out for a soda to discuss our current impasse.

"I've reconsidered what I said the other day," she said. "If you'd like to kiss me goodnight, that would be okay."

I didn't give her a chance to reconsider. I reached over and gave her a peck.

"Now see, that didn't hurt, did it?" I said to her sarcastically.

I don't think she cared for that comment. But with our first conflict out of the way, we had plenty of good kisses ahead of us.

Our courtship went smoothly. We were extremely compatible, and our families came from similar socio-economic levels. Even the

names in our families were similar. My mother's name was Verna. Her mother's name was Everna. Her dad's name was Charles, and so was mine. Our oldest brothers were both named Charles. We both had younger brothers named James. We both had younger sisters.

The first time my mom met Jean, she said, "Now that's the girl for you." We felt the Lord was definitely in our courtship and marriage.

Jean was also "straight as an arrow." She had been a Christian since she was 11 or 12. Her church had a strong Girls in Action group through the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union. She was a very active GA who went through the whole program. Jean's moral behavior was virtually perfect. She was definitely the real deal.

We had what people would consider now an "old-fashioned" proper courtship. We spent a lot of time talking and getting to know one another. Most of our dating centered around the church. We often bowled at an on-base alley. We took several day trips to New Orleans. We also enjoyed taking Jean's younger brothers and sisters bowling and to the movies.

But more than anything else, we just talked. We enjoyed getting to know one another and learning more about how to care for each other.

Over time I realized that Jean was the one I wanted to marry. Even before I became a Christian, I had a list of qualities I was looking for in a wife. I had been close to my mother, so she became my measuring stick.

And, by this point in my life, I knew I wanted to marry a dedicated Christian. Jean certainly fit that characteristic. She was smart, artistic, and had a great sense of humor. We laughed often and enjoyed being together.

Despite all of those commonalities, our engagement literally came by accident. I was simply testing her out and asked her, "What do you think about marriage?" I just wanted to get her opinion, because neither of our sets of parents were ideally suited for one another and argued frequently.

But Jean heard something totally different. She heard, “What about us getting married?”

Jean’s response: “I think we ought to.”

I was a bit stunned, but I decided to ignore the misunderstanding.

“Well, we could get married this August.”

And just like that, we were planning a wedding.



J.D. & Jean Stake. Wedding Day 8/19/1961

I married Gloria Jean Lacy on August. 19, 1961 in a very small ceremony at Trinity. My grandmother was critically ill at the time, so my brother Charlie was the only person from my family who attended. Charlie, who was stationed with me in New Iberia, was my best man. We had a small rehearsal the night before and showed up at the church and got married. Everything in those days, including our wedding, was simple.

We had already rented an apartment off base and spent the first



*J.D. & Jean Stake.
Wedding Day 8/19/1961*

night there. The next day we left for Missouri and Arkansas, where we honeymooned and visited my family. We spent some time at Table Rock Dam and Lake Taneycomo, where my family had vacationed when I was a child.

Discovering My Calling

Not long after I arrived in New Iberia, Brother O.C. Clark, Trinity's pastor, asked me whether I had ever considered the ministry. I hadn't at the time. I had only been a Christian for a few months and didn't even know many pastors until recently. Brother Clark wasn't aggressive about it, but I think he sensed that God was at work in my life and was leading me to serve in ministry.

I had been planning to go to college when I completed my commitment to the Navy. With as much as I loved basketball and helping people, coaching seemed like a natural place for me. But as I grew in my Christian walk, I started thinking about the possibility of serving in full-time ministry. By the time I got married in August of 1961, my life was changing in lots of different directions. Not only was I married, which was by far the biggest change in my life at the time, but God was starting something else in my heart—an interest in ministry that Jean and I were now exploring together.

As time went on, Jean and I started talking to Brother Clark about what God was doing in our lives. He guided us as we tried to

understand together what that call looked like. Then he began to equip us for ministry.

I liked the idea of teaching and coaching others. I had been doing it for years with my siblings and my mom. Ministry seemed to fit those interests. Over a two-year period, I realized that ministry was where God was leading me.

Brother Clark was my first ministry mentor. He was a good Bible expositor, who was evangelically minded. He was everything you'd want in a pastor. As the first pastor I really got to know, he became an example I'd follow for the rest of my life.

Even before I officially sensed a call to ministry, I would follow him as he visited people's homes on Monday night visitation. I was his sidekick. He would share the gospel, and I'd read scripture with him. Through it all, I paid attention to how he ministered to people. I watched how he cared for people. I noticed how he served Jesus

When I arrived at New Iberia, Trinity Baptist had about 250 people most Sundays. Our church grew by leaps and bounds. I wasn't the only person who felt called into ministry under Brother Clark's leadership. While I was there, we had more than 20 other guys my age accept a call to ministry. Brother Clark called us his preacher boys. Several of the others are also still in ministry today.

A few years ago, I received a call from another one of Brother Clark's preacher boys, Les Harris. He invited me to attend Trinity Baptist College's annual spring celebration. He mentioned that he was arranging for Brother Clark to also attend. Linda and I attended the alumni banquet, and I was totally surprised when I was recognized as the Trinity Baptist College 2010 Alumnus of the Year. I was not even aware that Les had nominated me for this award. Getting to reconnect with Les and Brother Clark made this honor even more special.

MY STORY



*Les Harris, J.D. Stake, O.C. Clark. J.D. named
2010 Trinity College Alumnus of the Year*

Brother Clark mentored and helped many other soon-to-be pastors, missionaries, and church leaders discern and grow in their ministry calling. I'll always be grateful that he took me under his wing and helped me see what God wanted to do through my life. In 2013 I, along with another one of his preacher boys, Bob Heustess, had the privilege of giving eulogies at his funeral. A scholarship in honor of Brother Clark has been established at Trinity College.



J.D. Stake & Bob Heustess 2002

As God continued to work in our lives, Jean and I eventually came

forward at a Trinity Baptist worship service and surrendered our lives to full-time ministry as the church confirmed our calling into ministry. At the time, we had no idea where God would take us. As was the case for most people called into ministry during that era, we assumed we were surrendering to a call to lead a church.

As I prepared to conclude my time in the Navy and Jean finished up her college work at the University of Southwestern Louisiana (which later became the University of Louisiana-Lafayette), we began making our plans for what was next. My naval commitment would be officially over in 1962, but I extended it an extra year while Jean continued finishing college. I left active duty in 1963, but I spent one more year in inactive duty.

I was officially discharged in May of 1964. Less than three months later, in August of 1964, attacks on American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin led to President Lyndon Johnson asking for and receiving congressional authorization to expand the war in Vietnam. My younger brother and several brothers-in-law would fight in Vietnam, but I missed it by a few months.

I knew that part of God's calling into ministry, for us, was also a call to pursue further education. I hadn't been a stellar student in high school, but that had been before I became a Christian and before my marriage to Jean. I was an entirely different person from the aimless, mischievous 19-year-old who entered the Navy in 1958. I was ready to buckle down and train to be the minister God called me to be.

Brother Clark pointed me toward his alma mater, Trinity College, in Clearwater, Florida. Brother Clark, a World War II veteran, had gotten out of the Army and went to the undergraduate program at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary before finishing his senior year at Trinity. It had been Billy Graham's alma mater and a bastion of conservative theology in that era.

So, as 1964 began, the two of us moved to Clearwater. I started my studies at Trinity, and Jean got her first teaching job at the elementary school in town.

CHAPTER 5

My College Years

When Jean and I arrived in Florida in 1964, we were both in our mid-twenties. We both had a strong commitment to Jesus and to ministering together. We didn't have any kids yet and wouldn't for another four years. We were hundreds of miles away from any of our family and no longer had the Navy behind us either. It was just us.

Those were some of the happiest days of our marriage. Everything was exciting and new. We were both enthusiastic about life. Jean had started her career as a teacher and was a natural at it. Despite my early misgivings about school, I loved everything about college. Plus, we were both heavily involved in our new church.

I had graduated in the bottom half of my high school class.

I had barely been able to read and write when I received my high school diploma. But the Navy offered me opportunity after opportunity to go to school. I learned from my time in the Navy that I could do the work and become a good student. Any deficiencies I had in my academic preparation; Jean made up for it. Having been at the top of her class, she was incredibly bright and a natural teacher. She was always confident



*J.D. Stake. Trinity College NAIA
Basketball. Three years.*

that I could do the work, and she could help me in any area where I struggled.

It wasn't until I arrived at Trinity that I learned the difference between a Bible college and a liberal arts college. Trinity was the former. I wouldn't be able to get an accredited degree at the school. Regardless of that though, I was thoroughly excited about my future at the school. Like I mentioned earlier, Trinity was Billy Graham's school. If it was good enough for Billy Graham, it was good enough for me.

I wouldn't trade anything for the three years I had at the school. It



*J.D. Stake Trinity College
Student. Preaching at Town &
Country Trailer Park*

was a tremendous experience and just what I needed to get back in the classroom and begin my journey into ministry.

We were also quite active in our local church. Both of us taught Sunday School. I had a trailer-park ministry on Sunday morning. In the winter, the snowbirds came down from Michigan and filled the trailer parks. Trinity College had about a dozen trailer parks that allowed us to come on

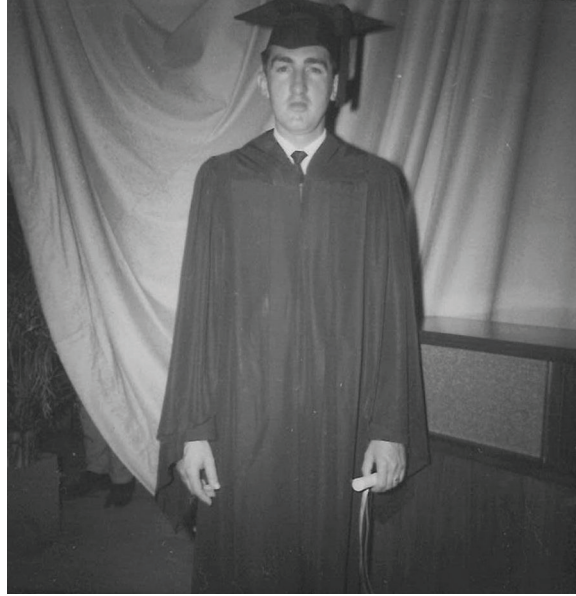
Sunday mornings and conduct worship services. It was a great practice for ministry majors like me. I was able to teach Sunday School and preach weekly, which provided me with a regular practicum in preaching.

Most people in the trailer park were senior adults, whom I really enjoyed serving. They were always appreciative of our ministry. It was a great opportunity to develop my preaching and teaching style. Preaching was new to me, and so I was learning, but I quickly realized I enjoyed doing it.

MY STORY

Having access to high-quality Christian mentors really boosted my spiritual growth as well. A couple of my mentors at Trinity had also taught Billy Graham 25 years earlier. They still had connections with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, which meant we were at the cutting edge of ministry during that time.

Jean and I grew like never before. We had access to quite a few quality Bible study teachers at Trinity. We were also able to enjoy the beach daily. We had a great fellowship and social life with the kids at the college. Frankly, our time at Trinity and in Florida was a touch of heaven on earth.



J.D. Stake. Trinity College Graduation. 1967

Trinity, like most other Bible colleges and Christian schools in the 1960s, had no counseling courses. The idea of Christian counseling wasn't even in circulation at the time. But I was still introduced to the idea of pastoral ministry and pastoral counseling. I continued to see myself mostly as a spiritual coach. Although counseling wasn't on my radar, I relished learning more about pastoral care and ministry. I still saw myself as a preacher and pastor of a local church. Counseling was a part of that, but it was never seen as a prominent role.

At the time, there were very few, if any, specifically Christian counselors in the United States. If people needed counseling, they either went to their local minister or to a counselor in the community. In the coming years, American families would change rapidly, and it became increasingly clear that pastors alone couldn't handle the growing and

increasingly complex counseling needs of their congregations.

Moving to Louisiana College

Despite how much we enjoyed our time at Trinity, I wanted to transition to a fully accredited liberal arts school so I could get a bachelor's degree. In 1967, Jean and I moved to Pineville, Louisiana, so I could complete a degree at Louisiana College, an accredited Southern Baptist school.

When we arrived at Louisiana College, we picked up where we left off at Trinity. We were active in our local church and with other students on campus. Jean taught at one of the local elementary schools. Living in married housing at the college, we made friends during that period with people who would be a part of our lives for years.

I was 28 years old when I showed up at Louisiana College and saw myself as a wily veteran at this point in my life. I was married, had served in the Navy for five years and graduated from Bible college. I became a student pastor of Elwood Baptist Church of Forrest Hill, La., an older rural church while I was in school at Louisiana College. For years, the church had gone from student pastor to student pastor. Although it was an older church, Elwood Baptist was mature and grew through the ministry of its series of student pastors.

Managing our money during college

Jean and I didn't struggle financially through college like many other married students. We both worked. Most of the time she was teaching. I was reimbursed very well for my part-time pastoring duties at the local church.

I had learned years earlier from my parents to manage my money well. Even though my family had been dysfunctional in many ways, both of my parents, having been teenagers and young adults during the Great Depression, knew how to stretch a dollar. My mom was particularly skilled at managing her money. They went by a simple budget and never fell into debt.

Right from the beginning of our marriage, Jean and I gave 10 percent of our income (a tithe) to our local church. When we first got married, I had no idea what a tithe was. But while she was going to college, she worked during the summers. The first thing she would do is put her tithe in an envelope and save it for Sunday to drop into the offering plate.

I remember asking her what she was doing.

“I’m tithing,” she said.

“What’s that?” I asked.

My wife then gave me my first lesson on what it means to give your first 10 percent back to the Lord. I think God blessed our thriftiness and good stewardship by providing for our needs—whether it was in those days at Louisiana College or in the years and decades since.

Stories from Louisiana College

By the time I was at Louisiana College in the late 1960s, the Vietnam War had really heated up. Both during my time at Trinity and at Louisiana college we had people who feigned a call to ministry to avoid the draft. Ministers were eligible for what was called a 4-D draft deferment.

I spent most of my time during the anti-war protests of the late 1960s at strong evangelical colleges and seminaries. I rarely saw or engaged with any of these protests. But I did interact with a group of Louisiana College students who had formed to protest the college for its mandatory chapel requirement. A few of us veterans went down to where they were having their rally and hosed them down with a water hose and heckled them.



*J.D. Stake.
Louisiana College
Basketball 1968*

When I started at Louisiana College, I still had a year of college eligibility to use after playing at Trinity for three years. I asked the coach if I could walk-on and he agreed. Even as a 28-year-old, I still had enough skills to compete. The coach told me he had two spectacular guards on the team. They would be the future of the team. I wouldn't be playing much, and the coach wouldn't invest much time or energy in me. That was fine with me. I enjoyed playing the game and the camaraderie that comes with being a part of a team.

One day, I was setting picks and running screens and doing the kinds of things you do in basketball when one of the high school All-Americans that we had on the team set a pick on me that nearly tore my arm off. In the process, I caught him with an elbow right under the chin and clotheslined him. The hit laid him out on the floor.

The coach sent me to the showers and told me to drop by his office on the way out. He told me when I visited his office, "I don't see that you have a great future here in the basketball program, so you might want to play in this first game and then just kind of bow out gracefully."

It made sense really. Jean and I had been talking about starting a family. I had mononucleosis the prior year and never really got back in shape. By that point, I had a full load of school and work. I probably wouldn't have quit on my own, but I appreciated the gentle nudge to retire. Though it was bittersweet, I knew it was time. Basketball sustained me throughout my childhood and high school years. Though I would enjoy it for the rest of my life, I didn't need it anymore. So when I suited up for Louisiana College for that opening game of the season, it was the last time I put on a basketball uniform.

Starting a family

By far the most exciting event of my two years at Louisiana College was becoming a father. After we were married, Jean and I had decided to wait several years after we were married. By this time, we were both approaching 30. Jean particularly became adamant that we didn't wait any longer to get started on the family.

At first, Jean struggled to get pregnant, as she had a few miscarriages in the beginning. We began to get anxious and wonder if we'd be able to have children. But we prayed that God would providentially give us a child at just the right time.

And he did.

I couldn't have been more excited as I waited for the birth of our first child. Jean and I had always wanted children. We had both come from large families and expected to have a large family ourselves.

As I got closer to becoming a father, I thought about my relationship with my own father, which had been improving. Ever since I left home and had been in the military, my dad treated me differently. He and my mother visited me on at least two different occasions at the duty stations where I had served.

By this time, my parents had lived near Searcy for several years. The change in environment made a significant difference in my dad's outlook. My parents now had three younger children in their home, and he was busy raising them. At this point, my parents and other siblings were about 300 miles away. Though we had a good relationship, it was difficult to be close.

At nearly the same time Jean and I were expecting our first child, first my mom and then my dad began to get active in a local church near their home. My younger siblings had started to go to church several years before that. Eventually, both of my parents and all of my siblings came to faith in Christ and became active in church.

Despite my uneven relationship with my dad, I didn't go into life as a parent with a bad attitude about fatherhood. My dad and I hadn't

been close. Like I mentioned earlier, he had a Jekyll and Hyde personality. He could be both happy and fun to be around. He could also be especially critical. As I planned to become a father, I wanted to be a different kind of dad though. I wouldn't use corporal punishment. I'd spend more time teaching and cultivating a relationship with my children. Jean and I were thrilled to have the opportunity to be parents.



J.D. Stake & Jay. Louisiana College Graduation May 1970

On August 30, 1968, Jean gave birth to the happiest baby we had ever seen. Jay Charles Stake was born at the beginning of my last semester at Louisiana College. The married housing apartments where we lived were called "The Fertile Crescent," because of how many kids were conceived there, so Jay had many young playmates during those early days.

MY STORY

With a newly minted family of three, those were exciting times for us. As we began to look for our next steps, God pointed us to the Big Easy to attend New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

CHAPTER 6

Discovering My Call

As I wrapped up my bachelor's degree at Louisiana College, I enrolled in New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in late 1969 and started the spring semester at the seminary. Because Louisiana College had only one graduation a year, I had already started at the seminary when I graduated from college.

During my first quarter in seminary, I was asked to be a supply preacher at Calvary Baptist Church in Thibodaux, Louisiana, about 50 miles west of New Orleans. A supply preacher either fills in for a pastor who can't preach one Sunday or between pastors if the church is looking for a new one. Calvary Baptist, which as a mission church of First Baptist Church of Thibodaux, was between pastors. The church asked me if I was open to being called as their pastor, and I said yes.

With that, I became a full-time pastor for the first time. Soon after Calvary called me to become their pastor, we moved permanently to Thibodaux, where we remained for much of the next decade. Thibodaux was a South Louisiana Cajun community. When we were there, the town had right at 12,000 people. At the time, seafood and fishing enterprises were a major industry in the town. But growth in the offshore oil industry became the driver of its growth.

Nicholls State, a community college originally, became a university the year I moved to Thibodaux. Growing by leaps and bounds, it was also spurring much of the town's growth.

I'm convinced that Calvary called me to be their pastor partly because I was a good softball player. The church had a championship softball team. I liked to say during my time there that my preaching

was mediocre, but I was a top-notch second baseman. I became the church's lead-off hitter, hitting for a high average and stealing quite a few bases.

I enjoyed my five years as the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church. I discovered I was a good listener. As a people-person, I enjoyed learning about the lives of the people in the church. I saw myself as a servant who was at Calvary to serve the needs of the people in my church. I never minded going to the hospitals, making pastoral calls, visiting the sick, and working with young people as they planned their marriages. In fact, I found that those were some of my favorite parts of pastoral ministry.

Pastoral ministry simply fit who I was in those days. With the pastoral model of O.C. Clark and having attended two great colleges by this point, I was well-equipped for a 30-year-old in his first pastorate.

A need for trained counselors

But there was one area of my ministry at Calvary I didn't feel equipped to fulfill. By this point in the early 1970s, families were changing rapidly. The Judeo-Christian values that had provided the foundation of American families since the nation's founding were being replaced by ethics that encouraged people to do what felt right to them. Those changes were severely impacting the families in my church.

It became clear to me that a sermon from the pulpit a few times each week wasn't enough to fix what ailed families. I ran into problems of incest, homosexuality, and severe drug and alcohol addictions that I hadn't been trained to handle. I had never run into a person addicted to marijuana until I was in Thibodaux in the 1970s as the New Orleans' drug and alcohol problems crept into our parish.

I had no resources to help. Not only did I have little training in how to counsel people with these kinds of problems, but I had no Christian counselors to whom I could send them either. I wasn't alone as a pastor in this either. Despite the general changes in our culture

taking place, many pastors in Southern Baptist life at the time had not gone to seminary. They had not been trained nor did they feel comfortable counseling people through these new issues arising in family life.

The only health professionals who could deal with mental-health issues were psychiatrists. States hadn't begun to train and license master's level therapists. In places like Thibodaux, this led to isolation for those with mental-health challenges and the pastors trying to serve them. The nearest mental-health professional or competent psychiatrist to me at the time would have been in New Orleans. Even in New Orleans, there wouldn't have been an abundance of therapists or psychiatrists to which I could refer people.

For ministers, they had few options for training in dealing with mental-health challenges. If you would have attended New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in the early 1970s, you'd only find a couple, if any, courses that even resembled counseling. Most of these courses were in the religious education department and were simply a spiritually enhanced version of human development. Because many pastors dealt with issues surrounding grief and bereavement, some of the classes would have included components to help with those issues. But we couldn't give much help to a person who was depressed. We could just tell them to read their Bibles, pray, and go to church, and they'd be okay.

I just knew that wasn't enough, but I didn't know what else to say.

Getting further training as a counselor

Little did I know during those first few years at Calvary, God was sending help. At about the time I arrived in Thibodaux, nearby Nicholls State University started a brand-new program in psychology and counseling, headed up by Dr. Frank Miller of Baylor University. He put together a faculty of three other graduate professors. Despite the fact that Nicholls State was a public university, Dr. Miller put together a program that was more reminiscent of a seminary counseling pro-

gram than a secular one, as he brought in several professors who had been trained at Southern Baptist seminaries. It was an ideal situation for a young pastor like me who was looking for ways to become a more effective counselor.

In 1971, I started in the school's new M.A. program in psychology, still just hoping to become better equipped for my counseling needs at Calvary Baptist. I still knew no other churches or denominational organizations that had full-time counselors at the time. I couldn't have imagined doing anything other than serving as a local church pastor for the rest of my life.

I also became a graduate assistant at the university. For a brief period, I was a full-time local church pastor, a student at the seminary in New Orleans, taking classes at Nicholls State, and a graduate assistant at the same time—along with being a husband and a father to a toddler.

It was a terribly exciting time in my life. I was in my early thirties, and Calvary Baptist was responding to my leadership and growing. In fact, our growth caught the eyes of Southern Baptists throughout the state. In my third year at the church we had somewhere between 25 to 30 new Christians. The church became a shining example for Southern Baptists in South Louisiana at the time.

During this time, Jean shined as a pastor's wife, too. We had a four-year-old and soon a newborn. She continued to teach school and was the consummate pastor's wife. The church probably appreciated her more than they did me. She was highly skilled and talented. I enjoyed watching her use her gifts in our church.

But frankly, I bit off far more than I could chew during those years in Thibodaux. At one point, I ended up with a bleeding ulcer. The doctor said it was poor eating habits. It wasn't serious, but it may have become serious if we wouldn't have treated it early. The FDA had just approved Tagamet, which was a miracle drug at the time. Since then, I've not had any other problems with ulcers.

Seeing God change a life

As a pastor, I found no greater joy than pointing people to Jesus and watching God change their lives in the process. As I got more training in counseling, I discovered that God could use what I was learning as a counselor to help not only heal their relationships with other people—but also their relationship with God.

Not long after I started pursuing my degree at Nicholls State, I met a young couple, barely in their twenties, with a baby. Judy, the wife, was attending Calvary, but her husband was not. As a Catholic, he resented that she was attending a Baptist church. At first, that made him very hostile when I'd come over to visit but he tolerated it.

I consistently visited Jack on campus (where we both were graduate assistants) and at home. I shared the gospel multiple times. I spent time counseling both Jack and Judy about their marriage. Jack eventually started attending church. One night, on his way home from church, he received Christ as his Lord and Savior. He came back to church that evening and made a public profession of faith. In his testimony that night to the church, he said I had visited him every week for a year. He credited that witness as part of why he committed his life to Jesus.

He became a leader in our church at Calvary for decades. I recently received an invitation to Jack and Judy's 50th wedding anniversary. Jack went from someone who was actively opposed to the gospel to a committed disciple who was a leader in the church.

Our family grows

Even with how busy life got for us in the early '70s, Jean and I never let go of our dream of a large family. We kept trying in the years following Jay's birth, but God didn't give us a child for several years. We began to wonder whether he ever would.

When we arrived at Calvary in 1970, it was a small church, with only 25 people attending most weeks. But of those 25 people, we had seven couples with adopted children. Adoption was a part of the

church's culture. Even as we grew, that continued to be a big part of the church.

The daughter of our worship leader befriended a runaway girl. The young girl was looking for a family to take in her unborn baby. When Jean heard of this, she came to me with the idea of us adopting the baby. At first, I was reticent. I knew how challenging private adoptions could be in Louisiana, but Jean was adamant that we consider it. She didn't want to raise Jay as an only child. This would be an opportunity for us to care for a child who needed a home. One day, Jean cornered me on the subject. "Will you at least pray about it?" Honestly, I hadn't done that, so I prayed—and God changed my heart and my mind on the topic.

I met with the young girl and told her there was a family in the church who would like to talk with her about adoption but wanted to remain anonymous. I would be the go-between. Because by this point, she was getting desperate, she agreed. We offered to take care of her medical expenses and would follow through with the necessary paperwork under Louisiana law to complete the adoption.

At this point, she moved on to another part of Louisiana, but we kept in contact. Jon David Stake (though he had a different name at birth) was born August 27, 1972. Two days after his birth, we took him home and he has remained an integral part of our family ever since.



J.D. Stake & Jon 1973

Jon knew the story of his adoption from the start. A few years back, he even met his birth mother. During that period at Calvary Baptist, we had quite a few young families. Jay and Jon fit right in. Since many of the families had adopted children, we had lots of support as new parents of an adopted child.

Four years later, Jean and I had our third child, Joel Lee Stake. With his birth, our family of five was finally complete. Even before Jay was born in 1968, Jean and I had been very compatible when it came to child rearing. We had been married for seven years before our first child was born and frequently discussed our parenting philosophies beforehand. We had both completed childhood and adolescent psy-

chology courses. Since we had both come from dysfunctional families where our parents weren't always on the same page, we made it a point from the beginning to stay united and speak with one voice. If either of us had any questions or reservations about a decision concerning the children, we worked those issues out behind closed doors.

Jean and I ran a democratic home. We always kept the veto and had the final say though. We used very little corporal punishment and always tried to parent through negotiation and accommodation. We'd reprimand and then give an alternative behavior option to the child.

Landing on a calling

As I mentioned earlier, our lives in the early to mid-1970s were incredibly busy as I led a growing church, continued my education, and raised a family. I clearly began facing some burnout. I had been involved in training on handling stress, and I could clearly see the signs of stress in my own life.

By the time 1975 rolled around, I was convinced God was leading me into a counseling ministry. I could see the need in our churches. I recognized the lack of resources most pastors had when it came to counseling. I had just completed a master's degree in Psychology. I felt like we were on the cutting edge in Louisiana when it came to Christian counseling.

When I resigned as pastor of Calvary in June of 1975, I did so with the expectation I would start graduate school and work on a doctorate and then move toward full-time counseling since it captured my attention so fully. I felt I was better equipped to be a teacher and counselor than a pastor. I started looking for places to start a counseling center and trying to find the right place to pursue my doctorate. I eventually helped start a counseling center for the Evangeline Baptist Association in Lafayette, Louisiana.

I chose to pursue my doctorate in family and marriage counseling at Luther Rice University because the school offered a unique ability to tailor your degree toward your own professional goals. Plus, unlike

other programs I was looking at, you didn't need to complete a long residential program first. I was able to complete most of the courses through correspondence.

In a 14-year period, from the time I left the Navy in 1964 to the time I graduated from Luther Rice in 1978, I graduated from four schools. I always saw education as an open door that gave me the credibility to do ministry. I saw the need to be well-versed and educated, biblically, theologically, and practically. It had been a long road since my struggles in grade school and in high school, but the more opportunities I had in education, the more I enjoyed them.

Exploring new horizons

Right after we left Calvary Baptist, we moved to Searcy for a couple of years. During that time, I served briefly as the pastor at Second Baptist Church of Searcy (now Calvary Baptist Church). Our third child, Joel, was born in Searcy on November 22, 1976. I had been taking the necessary courses to become a certified teacher and get my teacher's license in Louisiana. In the fall of 1977, I took a position as a social studies teacher at New Iberia Senior High School in New Iberia, Louisiana. At first, I just planned on staying at the school for a year. I was filling in for a teacher on maternity leave, but when she didn't return for the following year, I stayed on for two more years



J.D. Stake and Joel. First Birthday 1977

These were difficult days in South Louisiana with school integration. One of the reasons they hired me is that they knew I had been in the military. With the racial tensions high in the community, the school wanted a tough male in the classroom. As the New Iberia schools prepared for integration, neither African-Americans nor whites were excited about the transition. The black community had a great athletic program at their school and didn't want to give it up. The white community didn't want to integrate either, but neither side had a choice.

Most of the students didn't cause any trouble, but there were radicals on both sides of the issue that inflamed the situation. I remember rioting in the halls on occasion, and sit-ins, and protests at the football stadium.

The sheriff in New Iberia at the time, Errol "Romo" Romero, had been one of my fellow teachers at the high school when he unseated a 22-year incumbent for the sheriff's position. The new sheriff wanted to go in a new direction with the department—particularly as it related to youth. He asked me to join him and lead the youth effort.

I took the position at the sheriff's office and was specifically tasked with addressing juvenile issues in the parish. I felt like it was a providential move for me because both the sheriff and I had recently left the high school. We knew the unique challenges facing teenagers in the community and how that impacted crime, particularly as it related to illegal drugs.

We set up prevention programs at the high school, brought in a drug-detecting dog, and performed random drug searches. I also served as the spokesman for the office. While I was at the sheriff's office, we had the largest marijuana bust in U.S. history up until that point, seizing nearly 200 tons of Columbian marijuana.

I enjoyed my position and felt like I was making an impact upon the youth of our community. I felt like someday I would make my way back into a local church ministry, but it didn't seem like the time was now. When I first arrived at the sheriff's office, I came with the plan to

set up a counseling office in the juvenile division. I didn't want to leave until I finished what I had come to start.

But then one of the state's most popular Baptist pastors gave me an offer I couldn't refuse—a chance to do what I wanted to do within the context of a local church.

CHAPTER 7

Establishing a Counseling Ministry in the Local Church

Since those early days at Calvary Baptist Church when I had limited resources to meet the counseling needs of my local church family, I looked forward to a day when I could focus my time on using my counseling gifts in a full-time capacity. In 1981, Brother Perry Sanders, a legendary Baptist pastor in South Louisiana, gave me that opportunity.

Brother Sanders had been the pastor of First Baptist Church of Lafayette, La., for more than 20 years at the time (and he eventually served in that role for 47 years before his retirement). The church had grown steadily over that period, but in recent years it had exploded as more people moved into the area because of a resurgence in the oil industry in South Louisiana. The church needed to add staff to meet the needs of the growing church population and reach the new people flooding the community.

I had known Brother Perry Sanders since my Navy days, when I was stationed in New Iberia. We had met at an associational meeting where he was the inspirational speaker. From time to time throughout the years, we would see each other at Baptist gatherings in the state. In 1980, I ran into Brother Perry again. We talked about my ministry call, my time at Calvary, and my graduate work at Nicholls State and Luther Rice. I told him I was just waiting for the Lord to open the door for more counseling work.

“Have you ever thought about a staff position at a local church?” he asked.

I frankly hadn't. I didn't know of a local Southern Baptist church in the country that had a counselor on staff. It never crossed my mind that a church, even one as large as First Baptist Lafayette, would hire a counselor. He asked me to come visit him at First Baptist Lafayette and explore what it might look like if I joined the staff as a counselor.

The first time Jean and I visited the church to talk to Brother Perry, we turned down the position. I still had work I wanted to do with the sheriff's office and didn't want to leave them without completing it. But as Brother Sanders described the position he had in mind, the opportunity to start a counseling center on their campus, I knew it was the fulfillment of everything God had been putting in my heart. He urged me not to close the door on the position. A year later when he called again with a slightly altered job description, Jean and I accepted the new position.

On January 1, 1981, I officially joined the staff at First Baptist Church of Lafayette as the church counselor and singles pastor. I joined the staff of one of the largest and most innovative Southern Baptist churches in our state at the time. We had the largest church training program and the largest Vacation Bible School in the state. We were very involved in outreach and missions and had a strong Sunday School program.

Over the next few years, we continued to grow in part because of the growth in the counseling ministry and the singles ministry at the church. Thanks to a city-wide revival with Jerry Johnston and Mark Lowry, we went into all the local high schools. We had hundreds of high school students coming to the revival. In the first three to four years, I was at First Baptist Church of Lafayette we doubled in average attendance, from about 1,000 people to 2,000 people per weekend.

Establishing the church's counseling ministry

When we first arrived at First Baptist, our immediate goal was to set up a churchwide counseling service that addressed the needs of the church family, including singles, young families, and the older gener-

ation. We wanted to primarily do that through prevention programs in three phases. First, we set up a premarital counseling program for the never-married single adults. Second, we set up a divorce recovery program to help a growing number of people in our communities who were suffering through divorces. Third, we also started a grief recovery ministry to help our widows and widowers.

I also planned a variety of conferences and seminars for the general public designed to help people through life issues. We'd offer them a Christian alternative for how they had been dealing with the issue and then introduce them to Jesus as we did so. We also opened up a counseling center where we dealt with life issues on an individual or family basis through counseling.

We already had many church members who were involved in many of these activities outside of the church. We were able to involve them as volunteers to help us get these ministries started. For example, I had a good friend who was a physician and an addiction specialist who helped us set up a ministry to people with addictions.

We had a multi-faceted approach to our counseling ministry, but we primarily existed to reach people for Christ and provide a biblical approach to counseling.

Over the years, I've developed a concise counseling philosophy — to provide individual, marriage and family therapy from a Christian perspective using biblical principles. Technically, I use what's called a cognitive-behavioral approach to counseling. Research shows it's the most effective form of therapy out there and works for about 80 percent of the people who go to counseling.

The idea is simple. Give attention to a person's problem and provide a safe place for them to process what's going on. Most of the mental issues people face are developmental and have their origin in childhood. The cognitive-behavioral approach is based on the idea that perceptions influence behavior. It helps people see how their perceptions don't match reality and goes a long way in helping them change harmful behavior.

In the early 1980s, while I was starting the counseling ministry at First Baptist Lafayette, I had the opportunity to study for several semesters with Dr. Albert Ellis, who was considered the founder of Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy. REBT is another form of cognitive or talk therapy. He developed some of the most effective approaches to therapy used today and influenced many therapists, including myself.

Much of what I learned from Dr. Ellis influenced how my counseling changed throughout the years. In my early years, I tended to be much more directive with clients, even giving unsolicited advice from time to time. I've moved quite a bit in the other direction over the years, leaning now on a more Socratic and indirect approach to counseling. Instead of telling clients what to do to fix their marriage and family problems, I help them discover the causes and the solutions.

I've also recognized through the years that I would be well-served to make a good referral. Early on, I tackled some tough problems that I wasn't particularly skilled in dealing with. I've learned that if an issue isn't in my specialty, it's better to send the person to someone who is better equipped to handle it. Maybe because of my own family background or the overlap in pastoral ministry, I've always seen myself first and foremost as a marriage and family counselor.

Building a singles ministry

From the beginning, one of my two roles at First Baptist Lafayette was to oversee the singles ministry. In many ways, the two roles—overseeing the church's singles' and counseling ministries—were quite connected. Like I mentioned earlier, we focused the counseling ministry at first on premarital counseling, grief support, and divorce recovery, all areas that impacted our church's singles ministry.

Our Sunday School program for singles was another focus during this time. It grew extensively, to as many as 200 on most Sundays, in the first few years I was at FBC Lafayette. The oil industry boom in the early 1980s brought many new singles into the community. Some

of them were committed Christians that we were able to engage, and others were new people we reached with the gospel. As we reached new people, we connected them to one of six areas of singles

Part of the reason the church reached so many new people during this period is because of the intense evangelistic fervor in the church. On visitation nights, we had as many as 100 church members engaging people in our community. Certainly, the community was growing, but the church did its part to reach the new people coming in.

One of the best things I did as part of the singles ministry at First Baptist was hire Queenie Lau. In 1987 the seminary in New Orleans approached me about a young Chinese woman who was graduating and looking for a place to do an internship. We were the only church they could find who had a ministry among the Chinese. We had about a thousand Chinese students at the nearby University of Louisiana-Lafayette. About a dozen of them were a part of our singles ministry.

I interviewed her and brought her on staff for the summer in 1989. She was the most prolific soul winner and discipler I've ever met or known about. I could see her effectiveness right away that summer and approached Brother Sanders about bringing her on staff. We didn't have the funds for that, but I realized the impact she could have and raised the money to do so.

Queenie recently celebrated 30 years at the church. I don't know anyone else in Southern Baptist life who has been as effective in reaching Chinese people, or any group of international students, with the gospel. She shares the gospel with them, disciples them, and sends them back to serve Jesus all throughout Asia.

J. D. STAKE



J.D. Stake and Queenie Lau. FBC Chinese Ministry



Perry Sanders speaking to Chinese Ministry. J.D. & Jean in front row.

I had three young professional men who came to Lafayette with the oil industry who were excellent leaders in our singles ministry. All three, Jack Madeley, Randy Tolar and Richard Heis, were deacons and I depended on them a lot. Debbie Jeffreys also served well as my min-

istry assistant.

Serving with Brother Sanders

Brother Perry Sanders was a larger-than-life figure in Lafayette. He was very active in the community. You'd frequently see him at football and basketball games. He even sang the national anthem at times. Anytime you'd be out in the community with him, you'd get stopped. People knew him everywhere.

Brother Sanders was also very gregarious and outgoing. I often planned many trips with the church's singles—from ski trips, to mission trips, to trips to the Middle East. On one such trip to the Middle East, Brother Sanders went with us. We had about 40 others on the trip with us (including my sister, Becky, and my niece, Tami). On one particular day, we were in Egypt and getting ready to go to the Pyramids. As we assembled in front of the hotel, people were laughing and having a good time. It was tough to get everyone's attention. Finally, Brother Sanders had enough. He jumped up on a wall, snapped his fingers a couple of times, and said, "Attention, attention, follow your leader."



Dead Sea. Becky (second from left), Tami (center with hand on J.D.'s foot), J.D. (second from right), Perry Sanders (far right)

Brother Sanders was also a great person to work for. People on staff considered our worship leader his right-hand man because they had been the only two staff members at the church for a long time. I was his left-hand man, though. As such, I accompanied him on ministry endeavors all over.

Before going to First Baptist, I was kind of a role player. I was like a second fiddle in an orchestra. I've always preferred to work under the radar, behind the scenes. Despite my reluctance, Brother Sanders always encouraged me to play more prominent roles. I became much more assertive as far as my leadership thanks to Brother Sanders. He assigned me God-sized tasks and was confident, with God's help, I could do them.

Working with Henry Blackaby

In the mid-1980s, the Canadian Baptists invited Brother Sanders to speak at the evangelism conference for the Canadian Baptist Convention. While he was there, he heard Henry Blackaby speak for the first time. A few years later, Blackaby would write *Experiencing God*, a book that would have a profound impact on evangelicals worldwide, but at this conference he was sharing a vision for reaching the peoples of the world coming to the World's Fair in Vancouver, B.C., in 1986.

When Brother Perry returned, he asked three of us on staff to meet with Henry Blackaby and see what we could do to help him reach people attending the fair. We were then to report back to him what was needed and begin training teams to serve.

After flying to Vancouver and checking into the hotel, the three of us met with Henry at his office, where he was the director of missions for the Baptist association centered in Vancouver. He knew that we were coming to visit and wanted to bring up teams to help. We thought that meant he would give us a list of things he wanted us to do.

As we ate breakfast that morning, we asked, "What do you want us to do?" To our surprise he said something like, "Let's pray. Let's see

where God is at work and join him there.”

The three of us just looked at each other. We had flown to the other side of North America for Henry Blackaby to tell us to pray to discern where God wanted us to work. Although we had expected Henry to rattle off a list of tasks he needed help with, that’s not how he worked.

When he left, we laughed amongst ourselves. “This guy is crazy,” we said to one another. It turns out he wasn’t the one who was off base. We saw ourselves as an elite group of ministers from one of the largest Southern Baptist churches in the convention. We were in Vancouver to make things happen. We had a worldly, almost mechanical approach, to ministry at the time.

When Henry returned for our second meeting, he laid out his



Henry T. Blackaby

approach to ministry, which later became the basis for *Experiencing God*. Before we left, we made a few decisions about some ways we could serve during the World’s Fair, but those conversations changed how we approached ministry at First Baptist. We shared what we learned with Brother Sanders. The four of us began leading our respective areas of ministry in new ways, looking not just at the most effective and efficient ways for getting work done

but always asking ourselves, “Where is God at work?”

Before our meeting with Henry, we looked at ministry in a carnal way. We lacked a spiritual dimension. We knew how to grow a large church and be successful, but it was more of a secular model. Our

prayer lives and Bible study methods were shallow. We began to deepen our spiritual lives and commitments and encourage the church to do the same. The church was already growing and doing great ministry in the community, but after this shift in the church we saw a great revival in our efforts to send out ministry teams throughout the world.

My relationship with Henry didn't end with the World's Fair in 1986. He invited me to help the churches in his association develop singles ministries. I, along with several singles from First Baptist, made trips to Vancouver every year for the next four to five years to do that. We set up the association's first singles conference and then helped the church gear up to reach single adults in the community.

Most of the churches in the association were small. The largest probably ran less than 200 in Sunday School. Working with smaller churches, much of my work in Vancouver was reminiscent to what I did at Calvary Baptist Church in Thibodaux. I had been pretty successful in a small church reaching single adults. I was able to translate much of the work I had done at Calvary and First Baptist into the Vancouver ministry context.

I was always impressed with the spiritual depth of Henry Blackaby. He was both a godly man and a great spiritual leader. He regularly seemed to share unique insights on scripture that I had not seen before. While my relationship with Brother Sanders pushed me to become more confident and assertive as a leader, Henry taught me to become a more spiritual leader, who sought the Lord through prayer and Bible study. Thanks to Henry I realized that my own strength and wisdom would never be enough to discern what God wanted to do through my life. I had to continue to look for where God was at work and join him.

Family life in Louisiana

When Jean and I arrived at First Baptist in 1981, Jay was 12, Jon was 7, and Joel was 2. All three of them were in the same school where Jean taught until they went into high school. In our 13 years at First

Baptist, all three of our kids graduated from high school.



J.D. & Jean Stake, Jon, Joel Jay 1991

These were busy years for our family. Much of our lives were centered around church. Between the 10 full-time staff at the church, we had 15 children, from toddlers through high schoolers. Many of our kids' friends were other pastors' kids. Jay, who became a teenager soon after I joined the staff at First Baptist, became close with our youth minister and was very active in the church's youth ministry at the time.

I guess the best way to describe life with three boys as they grew older was chaos. They were always busy. Jean did an amazing job keeping up with everything. I was often gone during those 13 years I was at First Baptist, and she gets much of the credit for how the boys were raised. Other than normal issues related to growing up, we never had much trouble with the boys. If I had it to do over again, I would have made more time for us as a family.

All three boys grew into men of integrity. I'm proud of their honesty and independence. We raised them to think for themselves and as they've moved into adulthood, they've consistently done that.

As the boys were growing up, Jean and I took very few trips without them, but we did take a few, including to Cancun and Cozumel,

Mexico. But we always enjoyed being together as a family and enjoyed family trips. Since Jean taught school and was off during the summers, they'd spend between three to six weeks each summer at the beach in Pensacola, Florida. I'd often join them for a week of that time. Once or twice a year we'd also visit AstroWorld in Houston, which was an amusement park.

While we were in Lafayette, Jean flourished as both a teacher and a minister's wife. She taught the sixth grade most of the time and really preferred that age group. She always said that age group allowed her to catch them before they became teenagers. She was assertive and aggressive when it came to making sure the kids she taught got the best education possible. In fact, at times, when other teachers would be asked who the principal of the school was, they'd say, "Well, Mr. Lewis is the principal, but Jean runs the school."



J.D. & Jean's 25th Wedding Anniversary. Joel, Jay, Jon 1986

At one point, Jean was so effective as a teacher that the parish office sent an investigator to see if the reason her kids scored so high on their tests was because she was cheating. Over the years, she became a mentor to many of her peers and was well-liked among them.

I appreciated also that she was always open and honest with me, speaking truth to me when I needed to hear it. I remember, at about the time I started my position at First Baptist, we took ski lessons. I had always been athletic, so I picked it up by noon of our first day. Jean didn't get it so quickly and ended up twisting her knee. I remember her telling me after that, "Don't ever ask me to go skiing again."

A little bit later, after I returned from a ski trip to Colorado, I asked her what she would think about moving to Colorado. She didn't hesitate. "How would you like to be single?" she asked with a laugh. "I'm not moving to Colorado. Period. No further discussion."

That was a bit out of character for her. Jean was always with me, even when my plans and schemes didn't suit her. But we always had a relationship built on honesty. We were frank with one another, but we always reached a mutually satisfying agreement. At times that meant she had to serve me notice of some things she just wouldn't do.

Moving to Colorado was one of those things.

Fortunately, a move back to Arkansas—which would mark the next stage of our journey—was not.

CHAPTER 8

Back Home in Arkansas

In the early 1990s, Don Moore served as the executive director of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC). His ministry had been influenced by Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God* study and brought Henry to the state for a conference. While Henry was there, Don told him they were looking to hire a new staff member to oversee counseling efforts to ministers and their families. Henry recommended me.

Soon after that I received a letter from Don Moore, asking me to come to Little Rock for an interview. The letter described an opportunity to serve as a counselor for ministers throughout the state. I had done some of that while I was in Louisiana, as I worked with ministers and their families in our association within a 50- to 100-mile radius. During that time, I had developed a real interest in working with ministers and their families.

Jean and I talked it over and then agreed to interview for the position. Eventually, we accepted a call to take the position. It came at a good time for us. Joel—our last child at home—had just graduated high school, and Jean was at a retirement point after 30 years of teaching.

When we returned to Louisiana from our meeting, we talked to Brother Sanders and told him we felt God's leadership to take the position in Arkansas. We left with his well wishes but also with regrets. He didn't want to see us go. He even joked with us, "Well, okay. You can go, but Jean must stay."

My new position in Arkansas

Jean and I saw the position in Arkansas as a kind of dual role. I would minister to the state's pastors and she would minister to pastors' wives. Although she was never hired by the state convention, we saw it as a partnership. Over the next few years in Arkansas, we traveled together around the state to dozens of associational meetings, telling pastors about what was available in Arkansas to help them with counseling needs in their church and for their own families.

From the start, I had twin responsibilities at the convention that were reflected in these meetings Jean and I were attending statewide. First, the convention tasked me with helping to equip pastors to meet the counseling needs in their churches. Sometimes that meant connecting them with training to help them meet emerging pastoral care needs in their churches. Often, it meant I provided them with referrals for counselors better equipped to handle the increasingly complicated issues they were dealing with in their churches.

I remembered what it was like 20 years earlier as a small-church pastor in Louisiana and the lack of resources I had when it came to counseling members or referring members to other counselors. Christian counseling had come a long way since the early 1970s, but even in the mid-1990s, many Arkansas churches didn't have nearby counselors to refer tough cases to—and weren't equipped to tackle them by themselves. My job was to help.

To a degree, this part of my role hearkened back to my early desire to be a coach. I was coaching pastors, teaching them to be better counselors and helping them find their needed counseling resources. Although I had often seen my role as a pastor and church staff member and a coach, this role allowed me to coach more fully than others.

The second main responsibility Arkansas Baptists tasked me with concerned counseling ministers. I had an off-premises office at Baptist Hospital in Little Rock. This office had a full-time secretary, an IBM typewriter, and a telephone. I had no computer and was somewhat

isolated on purpose, for confidentiality reasons. My charge was to be available to any Arkansas Baptist minister, pastor, or staff member and their immediate families.

The two roles were highly connected because for pastors to faithfully serve their congregations, they had to be healthy themselves. Healthy pastoral marriages and healthy pastoral families often lead to healthy churches. A better husband becomes a better pastor. When their families were in good shape, it gave pastors credibility as they disciplined men in their churches.

In a state like Arkansas, most of our churches were small and many of our pastors hadn't been formally trained in college or seminary. I helped connect these pastors to schools like Liberty University, which allowed them to study remotely. I also flew in professors to train pastors in a variety of disciplines. I did whatever I could to help pastors get the resources they needed to effectively minister in their contexts.

My battle to get licensed in Arkansas

In the late 1980s and early 1990s many states passed laws that set up counseling boards. Arkansas, under Bill Clinton's leadership, was one of the first states to do this. The idea behind these boards, including the one in Arkansas, was to ensure when people went to counselors in the state, they were getting people who were effectively trained and practiced the discipline ethically. Before states set up boards like these, clients couldn't have the confidence they needed in the counselors they were seeing.

When Arkansas set up that first counseling board, most of its members were from colleges around the state. Few of the state's colleges had counseling programs. Professors from the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville and Southern Arkansas University dominated the board. Most of them were very secular in their outlook. Some of them were Christians, but they were not what I call evangelical, dynamic believers.

I was already licensed in Louisiana and, when I arrived at the

state convention, one of my top priorities was to make sure I became a licensed counselor in the state. The state convention wanted this too because they knew it would provide legitimacy to my ministry in the state. When I first applied for my licensure, I faced considerable opposition as an evangelical from some of the college professors on the board (who had a purely secular perspective). When the board discovered I referred to myself as a “Christian Counselor,” they took exception to it. Despite multiple graduate degrees and more than 20 years of counseling background, they denied my application, saying I wasn’t qualified to be a counselor in Arkansas.

When I asked them why I wasn’t qualified, they gave me a laundry list of activities I needed to complete—including completing another 30 graduate hours. My first response was to balk. I didn’t need the certification to do my job for the state convention. I told them I wouldn’t do it.

Eventually, I reconsidered though. I really wanted to get their license and meet their qualifications. I had a childhood friend who was now the associate to the state’s attorney general. After considering my situation, he told me I’d likely win if I sued the Board of Examiners over the issue.

I didn’t want to do that, but I was willing to do it if the board didn’t back down. Instead, I made the board a proposition. In time, we agreed upon a compromise. I agreed to take two courses, and the board agreed to license me.

In the process, I became friends with the executive director of the board, Dr. Ann Thomas. She encouraged me to apply to be a member of the board. When Mike Huckabee, a former Southern Baptist pastor in the state, became the governor, I got to know him.

The governor appointed me to the board the first opportunity he had. I served on the board for two terms. During my second term, I was the board’s chairman. Soon the governor appointed another minister to the board. For the next 10 to 15 years, we were able to promote Christian counseling on the board and make sure other Christians

who felt led into counseling didn't face similar persecution as I did.

Preparing for the fight of our lives

The first few years in Arkansas were busy for Jean and me. I traveled frequently throughout the state. As much as possible, she traveled with me. Little did we know though; God was preparing us for the biggest battle either of us would ever fight.

God had been so good to us throughout the years. We had been ideally suited from the beginning. Jean had just recently retired from teaching and was serving as a secretary on our church staff. We were preparing to serve Jesus together for the last quarter of our lives.

But God had one more fight ahead for us.

CHAPTER 9

Saying Goodbye

We knew right from the start the lump that Jean found in her breast was serious. She had a long history of fibrous tumors in her breast. Some of them had been surgically removed. This particular lump was behind some scar tissue.

It was only our second year in Arkansas, and she was still traveling to doctors back in Louisiana. So she went back to her regular doctor in Louisiana when she discovered the lump. They did the biopsy right on the operating table with the hope that if it were malignant, they'd remove the breast. The doctor discovered it not only was malignant; it was spreading quickly and already in the fourth stage. Her mammogram just six months earlier hadn't shown anything out of the ordinary.

She immediately began a long series of radiation and chemotherapy. Eventually, she was cancer-free. For about a year, we had a reprieve. It appeared we had the rest of our lives back.

Then the cancer returned. This time it showed up in her lung. Again, it was malignant. She sought treatment at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock, and those doctors consulted with her Louisiana doctors.

Again, Jean went through another round of chemo. This time the chemo almost killed her. She became deathly ill. Most of the time she was experiencing neutropenia, which means her immune system was shot. The entire experience was terribly difficult for her. She later told me that she wouldn't have taken the treatment if she had it to do over again.

Despite the pain she went through, she always maintained a good attitude. She told me from the beginning, "Let's not let the cancer take over our lives. We've been a Christ-centered couple from the beginning. Let's continue to be Christ-centered, not cancer-centered." In fact, even as she struggled through the treatments, she reached out to other women struggling through the pain. She tried to be an encourager. When she was able, she continued to work at the church as a financial secretary and be as active as possible in the ministry of the church.

Jean's faith in the Lord sustained her and empowered her to minister to other women and their families who didn't have as good of a support network as we did. We discovered in our journey that the divorce rate goes up very high for women who are diagnosed with breast cancer.

Many of the husbands choose not to support their wives during this period and leave them while they're recovering from cancer. Jean reached out to a lot of women who went through a divorce after they had been treated for breast cancer. As she did so, she always pointed them to Jesus.

Jean had probably taken more from our relationship with Henry Blackaby and what he taught us about *Experiencing God* than I did. She looked at her cancer diagnosis as a journey to see where God was at work. Yes, she was anxious and at times afraid, but she believed, with everything in her, that God and his purposes were bigger than the cancer.

Finding humor during the darkest of days

It was a difficult time for both of us. I must admit much of the time is a blur as I think back now. There are many blank spaces in my memory. There were so many treatments and so many ups and downs. Jean was always adamant that cancer would never take over our lives. But I must be honest, sometimes it did.

Maybe that's why I hang on tightly to funny memories of that

time period. For example, when she started losing her hair, I helped her shave it off. We became so tickled as we did it that we had to take a timeout before we could finish the job.

Later, while she was wearing a wig, we took a few days to go to Eureka Springs for the weekend. An elderly gentleman in a Lincoln Town Car rear-ended us, and it knocked Jean's wig to the backseat. When the little, old gentleman got out of his car to come up and see if we were okay, he came up on the passenger side. She popped up without any hair. It looked like she scared him to death. We got out of the car and made sure all of us were okay. Then we laughed until we could hardly see straight.

One day, she was in the hospital and on pretty heavy pain medication. Our middle son, Jon, who had been adopted, came up from Louisiana. He's dark complected and part Italian. He always took pride in being Italian and played that to the fullest.

Under heavy influence of medication, she asked Jon, "Do you want to really know how we got you?"

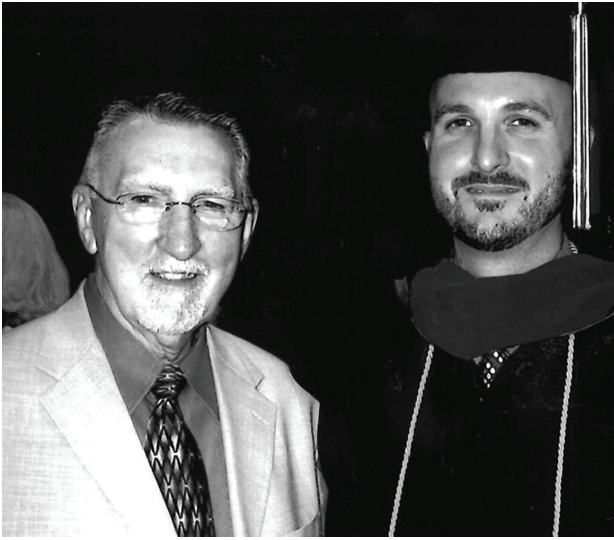
"Yes," he said.

"Well, you're really an Indian. We got you from the reservation." For a moment, it freaked Jon out. Later, he asked me, "Dad, am I really Italian, or did you get me from a reservation?"

Those moments of humor were the bright spots in a rather dark time in our lives.

Jean's last day

Jean had hoped she could stay alive long enough to see Joel graduate from college that May. She tried hard to hang on. Of the three boys, Joel had taken after his mom's academic prowess the most. She wanted to see him get his diploma.



*J. D., & Joel. Joel gets Ph.D. from University of Louisiana-Lafayette
2007*

But God had other plans.

Jean's last day was one of her best days. She had been hungry for a cinnamon roll, so I brought her one. Overall, she seemed to be feeling pretty good, but she was on a pretty strong dose of morphine. We even laughed at different times.

She knew she was dying, and she was a little nervous about the situation. I remember her asking me with a mix of excitement and anxiety, "What do you think Heaven will be like?" I didn't want to talk about the possibility. She might have been ready, but I wasn't ready for her to leave just yet.

Of course, I was speechless, and then she just went on to something else. It was just a good day all around. She felt good.

Her regular doctor was off that day, and we talked with her on-call doctor. He was a young doctor, who had good bedside manners. After he examined her and we talked about different options for treatment, he said, "Would you like to know what I think?" We told him yes.

"I think you should stop all treatment, pull out all these tubes, and

enjoy the rest of your life, whatever it might be,” he said. “I think it’s time to call hospice.”

Those words shocked both of us because they brought us to the immediacy of the situation. Jean was going to die.

She gained a sense of peace before I did and simply said, “Okay.”

That’s when they sent the hospice people in to talk to us

My brother, Charlie, came in about 6 p.m. A member of the family was with her 24 hours a day, just to make sure she got what she needed. I went home to get some rest at some point, and she visited with my brother. At about 8 p.m. she told him that she was tired and was going to sleep. Soon she slipped into a coma and never woke up.

She passed at about noon the next day, April 30, 1998, with my sister, Becky, my oldest son, Jay, and myself by her bedside.

Reflections on Jean’s passing

Jean always had a strong faith. From the first moment I met her until the day she passed, she lived with a commitment to love others as Jesus did. She truly lived for the Lord and the benefit of helping others. She was a person of real integrity and was always more concerned about my welfare and the welfare of the boys than her own.

Jean was an outstanding, award-winning teacher, but she was more concerned about her student’s spiritual lives than their social or academic lives. She saw the children she taught as her mission field. Everything about Jean was focused on ministry.

I’m a better person and a better disciple of Jesus because I married Jean. I may have been the minister, but she always had more faith than I did. She taught me that becoming the person God wanted me to become was more important than anything I could ever do for God.

When I married her nearly 37 years earlier, I was a new Christian. More than any other mentor in my life over the previous four decades, Jean taught me what it meant to follow Jesus. Everything from tithing, to prayer, to what it means to love Jesus daily, I learned from watching her day in and day out. For that, I’m forever grateful.

Yes, I was absolutely heart broken when Jean passed away, but I know this without a doubt. Today, Jean is more alive than me or anyone else reading this book. And, one day, we will meet again.

Processing my grief

I'm generally a methodical person. That's why the next morning after Jean died, I sat down with a legal pad and began to process my next steps. I was thoroughly worn out, both mentally and physically, so I asked myself one very important question, "If I were counseling me, what would I tell me to do?"

I wrote down a few basics, but at the top of the list I reminded myself not to get so busy helping others through this time that I didn't take time for my own grief. I had been well acquainted with the grief process throughout the years. I knew what I needed to do. I wrote it out and checked it off of a list.

I had just been appointed to the state board of examiners. Several of the counselors on the board were good friends, so I decided to talk with them and get some individual counseling.

I knew I needed group support as well, so I went to the American Cancer Society's grief recovery group. I was the only guy with 12 women. I cried and slobbered through the whole eight weeks. It was incredibly helpful.

One of my favorite passages of scripture has always been Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. It's a famous passage of scripture, particularly for anyone who is old enough to remember the famous folk song of the early 1960s based upon it. In these verses, Solomon writes:

For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven.

A time to be born and a time to die.

A time to plant and a time to harvest.

A time to kill and a time to heal.

MY STORY

A time to tear down and a time to build up.

A time to cry and a time to laugh.

A time to grieve and a time to dance.

A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones.

A time to embrace and a time to turn away.

A time to search and a time to quit searching.

A time to keep and a time to throw away.

A time to tear and a time to mend.

A time to be quiet and a time to speak.

A time to love and a time to hate.

A time for war and a time for peace. (NIV)

Through the good and through the bad, God has purposes for all stages of our lives. Some experiences bring great sadness—others happiness. But God is at work all the time.

As I grieved in the summer of 1998, I had no idea God was about to bring about a new season, one that would bring great happiness to the fourth quarter of my life.

CHAPTER 10

Finding Love Again

Jean did a great job preparing the boys and me for her death. One day, she called a family meeting when it looked like she was at the end of her life. She had met with our pastor and our worship leader. We had taken care of the legal issues. She had planned her own funeral.

She had one more issue she needed to work out with the boys and me. That's when she told the boys that if I decided to date again and even remarry, she wanted them to support me.

"Unless he does something stupid," she added.

The last line had been a humorous reminder of a friend of ours who had made some questionable dating choices after his wife passed away. Regardless, I wasn't interested in the conversation at the time. I was more concerned with losing her than what my future plans may have been. I acknowledged her thoughts and feelings at the time, but I didn't have much to add to the topic.

For the first three to six months after Jean's death, remarriage never really crossed my mind. Instead, I focused on the three boys and what was going on with them. I had neglected my job at the convention for about a year, so I felt like I had to make up for lost time there as well.

Getting to know Linda

Probably the first discussion I had about dating after Jean's death was with my brother, James, in the fall of 1998. One time, when I was in Searcy to visit my mom, James brought up the subject. He had heard rumors that there were some women interested in me, so he

asked, “What are you planning to do recreationally?”

“I don’t know. What do you have in mind?” I asked.

He was a deacon at First Baptist Church of Searcy and thought I should consider dating the pastor’s secretary.

“What about Linda Lee?” he asked.

“Tell me about her.”

James really didn’t know much about her, but he told me what he knew. We had actually met a couple of times. Jean’s burial had been near Searcy, and First Baptist Searcy provided a noon meal for my family. Linda was the pastor’s secretary and worked with their bereavement committee to arrange the meal. James introduced my siblings and me to her that day. I met her again a few months later as she came by to shake hands after I supply preached at First Baptist Searcy. But I still didn’t really know her.

I dropped the idea for a bit, but a few weeks later Linda came to mind again. That’s when I asked for her telephone number and called her. When I asked her out for dinner, she politely declined. She had been married before and didn’t plan to remarry. Because of that, she didn’t date.

I respected her decision and moved on in the conversation. As we talked, she told me she wanted to start a singles ministry at her church. Since I had been a singles minister and had taught other churches how to start them in the past, I offered to give her some pointers. Since my mom still lived in Searcy, I came into town often. I suggested we get together to talk sometime when I was in town.

Before that could be arranged, I invited her to my church in Little Rock for a conference about singles ministry where my friend Harold Ivan Smith was speaking. She came, and we visited some at the conference. After subsequent phone calls and her discussions with some pastors, she came to the decision that due to the circumstances of her divorce, she was free to remarry. Once again, I invited her to dinner, and she accepted this time.

We went to Jade Garden in Searcy for dinner on our first date.

We talked a lot about singles ministry, and she impressed me. I could tell right away she was extremely kind, but she was also bright and incredibly proficient. I knew the church was blessed to have her. We had a good conversation that evening. We got to know one another and went back to her house for dessert. She had made a chocolate cake with hot fudge sauce. On that recipe card, it now reads: Yield: One husband!

I knew right away, I wanted to see her again. We had more dates and, a few dates later, we went to Branson to see some shows. We drove back that night. We determined early on in our relationship to set a good example in dating for our children. At the time they were all four single and in their twenties. We decided we would never be in the same place overnight for appearance's sake. Our best efforts were thwarted, however, when my mom told my brother James that she couldn't believe I had spent the night at Linda's. It was late when I left Linda's and got to my mom's, so I did not wake her. The next morning, I made my bed and left very early so we could head to Branson. Guess she never knew I was there. Needless to say, I corrected that right away!

Initially though, most of our times together centered around days when I came to Searcy to visit my mother. We went to some Searcy High School football games and basketball games. We'd go to church events and watch television together. Sometimes Jennifer would join us for a movie at her mom's house. We double-dated once with my youngest son, Joel and his girlfriend (now wife), Kristi. They still laugh about that date because we embarrassed them by talking loudly during the guided tour at Graceland while listening to the tour guide on headphones. They very wisely only used one headphone so they could talk in a normal voice.

Frankly, we used any excuse we could to steal time with one another. When I was available, I was preaching all over the state on Sundays. When possible, she'd come with me. My mom was still living at home, and I'd often stay with her while I spent the weekend in Searcy.

Neither of us had dated in decades. It's different dating at 20 than it is at 60. Actually, it was a little awkward at first. We had lots of life experience behind us this time though. It was important to us that we get to know one another. We spent a lot of time just talking and learning about each other's backgrounds. We would look through one another's photo albums.

In fact, as a counselor, I tended toward the more analytical routes to finding out more about her. Early on in our relationship, probably around the second or third date, I handed Linda a copy of *The 5 Love Languages* test so I could get to know her better. I was a bit disappointed to discover her love language was acts of service. That wasn't my strong suit.

One of the ways it was different to date and court at 60 rather than at 20 was that we both had kids in the picture. My boys were in their twenties, and Linda's daughter, Jennifer, turned 20 the year we started dating. They were all much more experienced at dating than we were. So they gave advice—much of it unsolicited.

One time, when I was back in Lafayette visiting Jon and Joel and some friends, Tippy and Debbie Jeffreys, the subject of my new relationship came up. The boys started kidding around with me, and Jon asked me, "So have you kissed her yet?"

"No, we're just getting to know one another," I told him.

"Well, if you don't kiss her, she's going to think you don't like her," Jon told me.



Linda Louise (Crismon) Lee. Dating Days

So, the next time Linda and I were together, we had our first kiss.

The boys were curious about her, but they didn't say much. They let me have my space to figure out this new relationship. Jean had told them that I had her permission to date again. Right from the start, I told them I didn't know where this was going, but I could tell she was an incredible woman. I believed their mom would approve.

As Linda and I got to know each other better, we felt like God had put us together. We were different enough, personality-wise and in age, that it was unlikely we would have gotten together without the Lord's action. But we enjoyed many of the same things, such as serving in ministry together.

To top it all off, I found her quite attractive. She was beautiful both inside and out.

Getting married

As our relationship grew more serious, my greatest concern was never how much I cared about Linda. I knew we were developing a special relationship. I knew I was falling in love with her.

My greatest concern was my age. I was 59 years old when we started dating. She was 10 years younger. From years of marriage counseling, I knew there was a risk for relationships with any kind of significant age difference. If a couple like us had come to see me, I would have shared my concerns. We obviously had much in common, but I knew that the age difference would grow much more pronounced as we aged. Although I had always been active and athletic, I knew that might change as I grew older. I didn't want her to have to take care of an old man.

Eventually though, I worked through those concerns. By Christmas of 1998, after dating less than three months, we both knew where this relationship was heading. We knew we were going to get married, but we didn't make that public right away. I hadn't actually proposed yet.

To those outside of our relationship, it probably seemed quick.

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I wouldn't have recommended that quick of a courtship to people I counseled. We knew what we wanted in a marriage partner. We had walked down this path before. By the time Christmas rolled around, we knew that God had woven our lives together.

I planned to propose on Valentine's Day of 1999, but I just couldn't wait. So, about a week before Valentine's Day, I got down on one knee in Linda's living room and asked her to marry me. Of course, she said yes. I was excited and grateful. God had given both of us another opportunity at love.

As Linda and I prepared to get married in June, Linda wrote letters to each of the boys. She told them how much she loved me and assured them she had no desire to replace their mom. By the time we married, Jean had only passed away 14 months earlier. I appreciated the care Linda had shown through that whole process. Jean had told them before she passed to support me "unless I did something stupid." Linda showed them over and over again that my decision was far from stupid.

Linda and I were married on June 12, 1999. We had family and friends from many of the places we had lived join us for the wedding. I had people from every church I'd ever been connected to join us. I was in my first term on the Arkansas Board of Examiners. That Saturday the board adjourned early and joined us for the wedding.



J.D. & Linda Stake. Wedding Day June 12, 1999. Jennifer, Jay, Jon, Joel

In the middle of the wedding we had a little bit of a surprise when the pastor asked the traditional question, “Does anyone know of any reason why this couple should not be united? Speak now or forever hold your peace.” To our great surprise, a group from First Baptist Lafayette got up and gave a blessing related to why we should get married.

We had a very simple wedding, but it was very sweet and very sincere. We had people telling us after the ceremony that it was the most real wedding they had ever attended.

Our guests were treated to a very special sweet treat that day. Don Bing-



*J.D. & Linda Stake.
Wedding cake courtesy Chef
Don Bingham*

MY STORY

ham, the executive chef for then-Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, made our wedding cake, a large four-layer chocolate cake with chocolate fudge frosting and chocolate-covered strawberries. It had so much chocolate on it that you could smell it when you walked into the church. And it tasted even better than it smelled!

We had a wonderful wedding day full of fun, friends and family on that Saturday in June of 1999. The best part is, we walked out of that church married. Just 14 months after Jean's death, God had given me an ideal partner once again

A Time to Invest

One of the best parts about being back in Searcy the last few years is that Linda and I occasionally run into people I knew in high school. In fact, we go to church with several of them. But I can run into people I know anywhere.

When we were engaged, Linda went to see her doctor for a minor procedure. He was one of my former high school teammates. When she mentioned to him that she was engaged to me, he launched into this story from our basketball days.

It was our district tournament, and we were down by one point with 10 seconds to go. We stole the ball, and we flew down toward the other basket together. He missed a layup, but I followed it up with a tip in just as the buzzer went off. Those 10 seconds were some of the most exciting of my high school athletics career—and led to a surprising win for us in the district tournament.

Fourth quarters matter. You win championships in the fourth quarter. Teams that play well for three quarters and struggle in the fourth rarely win.

The truth is, how you live in the last quarter of your life depends on how you lived during the first three quarters. You're building spiritual and emotional reserves throughout your life that you'll lean on at the end of life. I believe the goals and plans you make during the early years of your life can lead to more joy and peace in your older years.

It reminds me of what happened during my senior season of high school basketball. I was the starting point guard, along with three sophomores and a junior. We also had a rookie coach. As a building

year for our program, it was pretty clear we were not going to be the top team in the district. I knew we'd be lucky to win half of our games. I led the team in scoring and free-throw shooting and was second in rebounding, but we had a pretty dismal record. Early on, I accepted the inevitable and learned to find joy even in the tough times.

I think that experience and others as a young person helped me set the stage for the fourth quarter of my life. I always wanted to finish well. I've been around long enough to know many in ministry who have fallen morally in their later years. I never wanted that to happen to me. I was always encouraged by my mentors to live a pure, clean life so I could finish well.

In many ways, these last 20 years have been about investing in others. Throughout this book, I've mentioned many people who invested in me throughout the years. I wouldn't be where I am now if it had not been for Grandpa Johnson, Bill Alley, O.C. Clark, Perry Sanders, Henry Blackaby, and so many others. In the last 20 years, it has been my turn to pass the baton and to invest in others as others have invested in me. That's meant everything from investing in a new marriage, to investing in my children and grandchildren, to investing in churches as an intentional interim pastor, to investing in a new generation of counselors in the state of Arkansas.

Investing in my family

When Linda and I were married in the summer of 1999, we had only dated for about nine months. Both of us had already been married before so we knew a bit of what to expect, but we still didn't know much about each other.

For the first few years after we were married, we tried to rectify that. We made concerted efforts to visit the places that had impacted us and meet the people who had shaped us. These were great experiences. Our travels took us all around the United States, from Florida to Louisiana to Missouri to Texas to Indiana to Hawaii.

Looking back now, those trips were great for a number of reasons.

First, Linda and I were able to experience these places together and see firsthand the places we had heard each other talk about. But also, as I headed into the fourth quarter of my life, it was a great opportunity to reconnect with the people whose lives had touched me for the previous six decades.

I've always enjoyed traveling, and I've always done a fair bit of it throughout the years. In the last 20 years, Linda has caught the traveling bug, too. She always says I'm a lot of fun to travel with, and the feeling is mutual. We also enjoy vacationing with friends. We had a glorious week in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, with Jack and Jan Madeley. We've made numerous trips to Branson with Don and Nita Childress, in addition to visits in their Canton, Texas, home where some rowdy games of Texas 42 have transpired.



J.D. & Linda Stake and Nita & Don Childress. 2005. Dixie Stampede, Branson



J.D. & Linda Stake. Carnival Cruise

One time Linda planned a surprise trip for us. I didn't have any idea she had it in the works. But one Friday she showed up at my office and told me to get in the car. We were headed to Hot Springs, Arkansas. She had worked with my assistant to cancel all my appointments for the afternoon. We had a wonderful weekend with massages and hot baths. I usually don't like surprises, but that was a good one.

As Linda and I continued to develop our relationship, we were also nurturing a new blended family. As your children age, your relationship with them necessarily changes with it. By this point, all my kids were grown and were chasing their own goals.

Though the boys have scattered in recent years, we stay in contact as much as possible, talking on the phone once a week usually. We enjoy our time together when we can get it. All of my boys enjoy eating out, so when we get together, we like to try new restaurants. We also enjoy attending sporting events or watching them together on TV.

All three of the boys are big sports fans—particularly college sports. Some root for Louisiana State University (LSU), and others root for Arkansas. We love to rib each other via texts about the outcomes of the annual games between the two teams. We've had a few times recently when LSU has been nationally ranked coming into the game and Arkansas knocks them off at the end of the year. The back

and forth between the four of us can get pretty entertaining.

With my marriage to Linda, I've had a daughter for the first time. She has been a joy to get to know. I've treated her a lot like I have treated my younger sisters. I've not tried to parent her, but I've always tried to be there for her in any way she needed.

As any parent can testify to, every child is unique. I've seen that firsthand in my children. I'm proud of the people they've become—and excited for their futures.

In 2001 we had two weddings. Joel married Kristi Letlow in April, and Jennifer married Chuck Gray in May. I was especially honored to be asked to officiate both weddings. Our family was growing.



Jon, Joel, J.D., Jay 2001

MY STORY



Joel & Kristi (Letlow) Stake's Wedding. 4/15/2001. J.D. officiated



Chuck & Jennifer (Lee) Gray's Wedding. 5/26/2001. J.D. officiated

Another highlight in recent years has been the arrival of grandchildren. My first grandchild was Jennifer and Chuck's son, Chandler. Often, when Chandler was little, we would pick him up and bring him



*J.D. Stake & Chandler Wayne Gray
2001*

to Little Rock. We often had him for weekends back then. We haven't missed very many of Chandler's baseball, football, and soccer games throughout the years. Because we now live in the same city, we're able to be a part of the regular flow of his life. But I think if you ask Chandler about some of the good times we've shared, he'd mention going to Branson with us, trips to the airport to watch the planes and the water pistol fight at Blanchard Springs. We've had lots of fun times together. I was honored a few years ago when he made a profession of faith and asked me if I would baptize him.

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MY STORY



J.D. Stake & Van Doran Stake 2012



J.D. Stake & Evelyn (Evie) Lealae Stake 2009

Evie and Van, Joel and Kristi's kids, have always lived a bit farther away. Right after Evie was born, Joel and Kristie moved to the Virgin Islands for his post-doctoral work. Then they moved to Nashua, New Hampshire. Van was born during Joel and Kristi's time in New

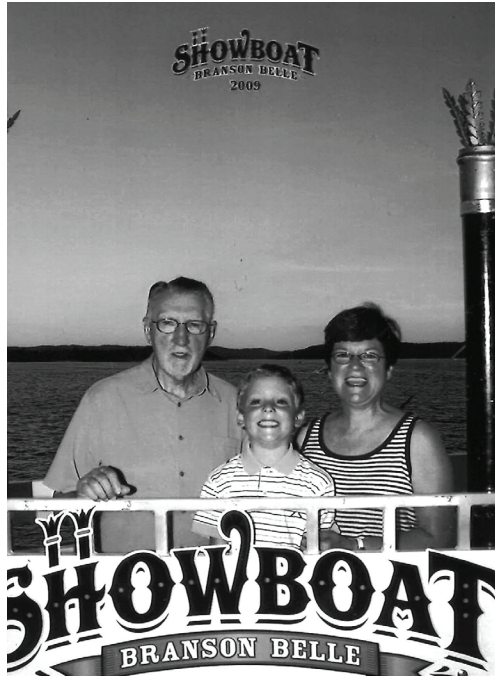
England. Van Doran was named after his grandfather Johnson and me. We tried to visit a couple of times a year while they were in New England. We made lots of memories eating breakfast at Parkers Maple Barn and getting hot dogs and frappes at Hayward's.

Now that they've moved to Arcadia, La., we get to see them more often. Although they are still four hours away, we were excited to get to drive down for birthday parties, one of Evie's basketball games and one of Van's soccer games and his piano recital. Another very special highlight was to be able to witness Evie's baptism. Last year we enjoyed taking Evie and Chandler to Branson for a few days and hope to do that again soon, only with Van also next time. We try to take advantage of every opportunity to spend time with our grandchildren.



J.D. Stake's three grandchildren: Chandler, Van, Evie 2012

MY STORY



*.J.D. & Linda Stake & Chandler.
Branson Belle 2009*



J.D. Stake, Evie & Van. Hayward's, New Hampshire 2012

Investing in churches

Throughout the first decade of the 21st century, I continued to serve Arkansas Baptist churches as a counselor and as part of the convention's leadership and worship team. Throughout that time, I saw God work in many ways. One of the ways I saw Him at work is through an Intentional Interim Program we started in the state. It's a program to help churches whose pastors left the church due to some kind of conflict or a period of significant transition. Often conflict can have a corrosive impact upon churches. If not dealt with properly, the conflict can and will rip a church apart.

Essentially, it's a two-fold program. It involves a church bringing on a highly trained *intentional* interim pastor. The congregation also elects a transition team. The minister and the transition team essentially evaluate and restructure the whole church program under the leadership of this intentional interim.

The intentional interim pastor and the transition team work on a variety of key issues, including structuring the worship service, defining what the church is looking for in its next pastor, celebrating the church's history, etc. Then the team begins to set goals for the church to achieve. Finally, the church elects a search team to find the next pastor. The intentional interim stays involved through the installation of a new pastor.

When we first began implementing the program throughout the state, I was one of the people who trained the interims on how to do the program. Then, over a 15-year period, I served as an intentional interim pastor at eight local churches. These were always special times because you had the opportunity to see God turn around churches that plateaued or were in decline.

One particular experience that stands out was at First Baptist Church of Batesville, Arkansas. It was a high-profile church that had experienced significant conflict between the previous pastor and the lay leadership for a decade prior to my arrival. The pastor agreed to resign if the church would enter the Intentional Interim Program.

When the program was presented to the church, they voted to participate. They later asked me to come in view of a call as the Intentional Interim Pastor (IIP), but I did not get the number of votes required by their constitution.

A couple of months later, someone from the church's pastoral search team called and asked me to come back and preach in view of a call again. The search team explained that there had been confusion about what they were voting on the first time I had come. Confusion is typical in conflicted churches. I was told this time would be different. So I preached again in view of a call, and this time the church called me to serve as their intentional interim pastor.

We started out trying to identify the areas of conflict in the church and look for ways to resolve them. Because conflict is always a big barrier in the churches where I served as an intentional interim, I usually dug into my training with Peacemaker Ministries, created by Ken Sande, to help resolve the conflicts. I trained churches throughout the state to use the biblical strategies by Peacemakers to resolve conflict and leaned on it heavily when I served as an intentional interim.

First Baptist Batesville elected a great transition team. Over 100 people were nominated to serve on the team, and the church chose a selection of go-getters to be a part of the team. We agreed to work in subgroups and come before the church as a transition team to make recommendations.

Subcommittees studied and equipped the church to do a variety of important tasks. For example, one of those tasks was to study and update the church's history. When a church is dealing with conflict, it's important that they remember what God has done through them in their history. Understanding where a church has been is a key part of capturing a vision for what's next.

Once the transition team had finished their work, the church picked a search team; I trained that team on the best strategies to find a good pastoral fit. Then they began a meticulous search process to find a pastor whose gifts and interests fit the needs of the church.

At FBC Batesville, we also did a churchwide survey to get an idea of what the church members wanted the church to do going forward and what they expected from the church. We had virtually 100 percent participation from the membership. One of the transition team's sub-groups took a look at the survey findings and developed a church profile from it. At that point we began to develop some long-range goals.

One of those goals was to develop church unity and harmony, which hadn't been there for the past 10 years. That meant we had to try to dial back the influence of certain elements of the lay leadership. We restructured the church so that the authority was vested in a larger group of people instead of a handful of strong leaders. That meant some leaders had to step up and others had to step back.

Previously, about five people had most of the authority in the church. At times that meant I had to remind the strong lay leaders why we were doing the intentional interim program and to encourage them to step back. I wasn't a dogmatic leader. That's never been my style anyway. But we determined from the beginning that we would work as a unit. We wouldn't move forward until we were all in agreement. I kept everyone committed to that objective. Usually, those I had to remind of these goals were more than willing to release some of their leadership so that more people could get involved.

One of the highlights during my time at First Baptist Batesville was preaching a brand-new series of sermons on Romans chapter 12. From my perspective it was some of the best preaching I ever did. I called it "The Christian Life at its Best." I went almost word-for-word through the entire chapter. That chapter has been a foundation for my life ministry—especially the first three verses. In those verses, Paul writes: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace

given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you.” (Romans 12:1-3, NIV)

I’ve always believed that God is in the life-transformation business. Romans 12 gives us a great picture of this.

I felt like my time at First Baptist Church of Batesville was a kind of culmination of all my ministry experiences and all I’ve learned in ministry. It was an opportunity to lead a church that really grasped the concepts of the local church and was genuinely transformed when they followed the leadership of the Lord. Eventually, the church hired a young pastor who was a strong leader and has faithfully guided the church since then. He was able to focus the church around a vision. God has used the church in exciting ways since that time.

Investing in pastors

As part of my work with Arkansas Baptists, I’ve continued to counsel pastors throughout the state for the last two decades. Much of that work has been with pastors who had problems with their marriages and/or children. Often, I’d see similar scenarios unfold. I’ve worked with several couples who married young. He was called into ministry, but she didn’t want to be in ministry. Sometimes the wife would leave the marriage, and the husband would still be pastoring the church. Sometimes the church was divided on whether they wanted the pastor to stay.

On some of those occasions, I was able to work with the church and the pastor through a restoration process, even if the marriage couldn’t be saved. We tried to act in a redemptive way where the pastor would publicly confess his sin and demonstrate evidence of repentance. In those cases, the pastor would usually meet with me and an accountability partner throughout the process. The process would vary greatly depending upon the circumstances.

When I start counseling couples, I always start out with the goal of reconciliation. As a Bible-believing Christian, I don’t think divorce

is ever God's best for a couple. But you must have both people in the relationship willing and able to reconcile to see it happen. Sometimes one spouse simply bails.

In Arkansas, we have a covenant marriage license option. When couples enter into that agreement, they can't get a divorce without participating in counseling. Because of that, I've had to counsel couples who were already quite committed to the idea of divorce. One or both of the clients were only attending counseling to check off something they needed to do in order to get the divorce.

As a counselor, I don't get to make the choice to stay married for them. Though I don't always approve of the outcomes, I try to faithfully serve my clients and help them make these decisions in a healthy way. In those cases, the outcome was poor, but the process was good.

Investing in counseling

When I first became a full-time pastor in rural Louisiana in the early 1970s, I began facing issues I wasn't prepared for as I counseled the church's members. As I mentioned earlier, that initially had been the reason I wanted more training in counseling. I wanted to better be able to deal with the problems families were facing in the 1970s.

I didn't have the luxury of referring members to nearby Christian counselors either. There simply weren't any in our community. Even if I wanted to connect them to secular counselors elsewhere, I would have needed to send them an hour away to New Orleans to get the counseling.

With that as the background, I've always wanted to do what I can to make qualified Christian counseling available to more people. In the past 20 years in Arkansas, that's been a big part of my work—and I feel like a big part of what my legacy will be in the state.

One way in which I've invested in counseling in recent years has been through my local Baptist association in White County. I helped to start the Calvary Baptist Association's counseling center in 2002, long before Linda and I moved back to Searcy. The association's direc-

tor of missions asked me to help start the counseling center to provide the association's churches with additional counseling support. At the time, we used the associational office for the center, but within the next few years they built an addition to the office to house the center.

When I retired from the ABSC in 2009 but was still on contract to counsel ministers and their families, I asked the association if I could use the center to meet with clients who lived in the northeastern part of the state. In addition, I volunteered at the counseling center two days a week. About two years ago, they asked me to work part time at the counseling center, seeing about 10 clients a week. I work with an excellent full-time counselor, Jan Gaddis, who is also one of my supervisees. We only take referrals from local Baptist churches, but our appointments are usually booked a month in advance.

Another way I've invested in counseling in Arkansas has been by mentoring 25 new counselors in the past 18 years. I was first approached to do this in 2001 while I was a part of the Arkansas State Board of Examiners in Counseling. I had never taken a graduate-level course on supervision. That kind of course was required to supervise counselors in the state. After taking the course, I got the opportunity to supervise other counselors, and I've been doing it ever since.

In Arkansas, licensed counselors have two tiers. First, you become a Licensed Associate Counselor. Then, after you complete 3,000 hours of clinical supervision, you become a Licensed Professional Counselor and can counsel clients without supervision.

My participation in the program has been a professional highlight of the past 20 years. Those I've mentored have been great people, committed Christians of high moral character. Today, most of the people I refer clients to are those I've mentored.

As I've mentored these counselors, I've seen them disperse throughout the state. Today, there are few places within the state where you can't find a Christian counselor. In a sense, I feel like I've brought my ministry full circle.

CHAPTER 12

Heading into the Future

I had never given much thought to retirement throughout the years. I certainly did the responsible financial planning to prepare for it, but I gave little thought about what I would do when I retire. I knew that someday I'd have to go through a formal retirement process at the state convention. That kind of transition is a part of life.

But, as I watched other people go through that process, I was determined to never fully stop working. Counseling is a part of who I am. I didn't see any reason to quit doing that just because I ceased to do it for a specific employer. I couldn't just play golf every day. I found it boring. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life focused on recreation. I knew, even when I officially retired, I had meaningful work to contribute.

In 2008, my day finally came to go through the formal process of retirement with the Arkansas Baptist State Convention. As I had been planning for years, that transition didn't end my ability to use my experience and gifts to contribute to the benefit of others. In fact, right after I retired, the state convention re-hired me on a contract basis to continue to provide counseling services to ministers. I continued to work as an intentional interim at various churches. I continued to mentor aspiring counselors. I may have slowed down my work at times, as my health required me to do so, but I've worked continuously.



JD's Retirement from ABSC 2008

I encourage anyone considering retirement to not just plan for their financial needs after retirement but to consider how they can remain useful and productive. Even if you decide to no longer take a paycheck from an employer, look for ways to volunteer your skills to help others, whether that's in your church or in a community service group.

Anyone who reaches retirement age has years of experience using their skills to serve people. Letting your skills go dormant when you retire doesn't just hurt you, it means people in your community miss out on all you have to offer.

One of the changes we made when I retired from the ABSC was to build a house in Searcy. Jennifer and her family lived there. We both had siblings there. It gave us a chance to spend more time with them.

I left Searcy 50 years earlier when I moved to Lebanon to work for my uncle after high school graduation. Much had changed in the city since I left, but much had stayed the same, too. Now, when I go

to church on Sunday morning, I'll look around and see several people from my high school days. When I visit the fitness center, I see one of my teammates from the Searcy High School basketball team. At 83 years old, he is a trainer at the center.

Dealing with aging

Not long after I retired, while I was doing an intentional interim at a church outside of Little Rock, I started noticing that I had a tremor in my left hand from time to time. At times, it would get worse in the evenings so at first I thought it was simply fatigue. Unfortunately, it continued to progress.

My general practice doctor sent me to a neurologist to get a better look. The neurologist looked at the symptoms and diagnosed me with Parkinson's Disease. It's a progressive neurological disease that won't get any better. I can slow it down through treatment, but I can never stop it. Some have it worse than others.

Most of my symptoms are controlled with medicine though the disease impacts my vocal chords and mobility. I'm only now—10 years after my diagnosis—starting to have difficulties getting up and down and getting in and out of the car and bed. But I've been blessed. I can still do much of what I could previously.

As someone who has been active all of his life, losing mobility has been tough to deal with at times. I've struggled with the idea that I might someday soon be so weakened that I can't do what I'm accustomed to doing.

At times, it leaves me anxious. I try not to go alone anywhere because I know that one of the biggest problems faced by Parkinson's patients is falling and injuring yourself. The common saying among those with this disease is that, "It's not Parkinson's that gets you. Something else will take your life first." That's never been entirely comforting for me.

But through this experience God has been forever faithful. I've learned to accept the inevitable. Instead of asking, "Why me?" I ask,

“Why not me?” I’m just one of thousands diagnosed with Parkinson’s. I’ve tried to accept that as part of the human race, my body will deteriorate. I have accepted the inevitable, move forward, and trust the Lord along the way.

As I mentioned in the last chapter, I’ve always wanted to finish well in my life. I want the Lord to equip me to be a good testimony to those around me. I know there are many people worse off than me. I want to be available to others, particularly those who aren’t in the same spiritual place. I have scripture on my office walls that reminds me of my relationship to the Lord and that He is always working in my life. I pray regularly that God will make me strong and courageous so that I can deal with Parkinson’s in a spiritually successful way.

My advice to future generations

Part of my goals for this stage of my life is to pass the baton to others who will be around when I’m not. In eight decades of life, I’ve learned a few things about what matters—and what doesn’t. Looking back, I’ve seen many times what looked important during one particular stage of my life didn’t seem to matter as much in the next.

Yet there are priorities that have clearly stood the test of time. That’s why, as I wrap up this book, I want to share with you and anyone else who might read this, these priorities that have stood out for me. I encourage you to take some time and make sure that these areas of your life have your attention.

1. Establish your relationship with God.

Nothing else is more important than getting your relationship with your creator right. The Bible tells us that God “has set eternity in the human heart.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11) You were created to know God and to make Him known in the world. Until you understand that, life will never make sense.

Once you commit your life to Jesus, dedicate yourself to becoming a fully committed disciple, getting involved in a local church, and

serving the Lord in ministry. I've walked with Jesus for more than six decades now. Life hasn't always been easy, but the Lord has been there with me every step of the way. My life, and everything that has happened along the way, has had meaning because God changed my life as a 20-year-old in that Pensacola tent revival.

2. Pay close attention to whom you marry.

Take it from a marriage and family counselor, besides your relationship with the Lord, no other relationship will impact your life more than the one with the person whom you marry. People rarely realize that the entire trajectory of their lives changes depending upon a person's choice of a spouse. Spend as much time as possible courting your spouse. Get to know the person before you say, "I do."

Much of my happiness and joy over the last 60 years have come thanks to my relationship with Jean and Linda. I'm so glad God brought both of them into my life.

3. Be dedicated to your family.

I believe it's significant that the Bible talks so heavily about family relationships. Your relationships within your family won't develop by accident. Whether it's your parents, your siblings, your spouse, or your children, you'll have to continually nurture those relationships.

Make sure you do so. You may be tempted to shortchange your family relationships in order to pursue other goals but doing so comes with grave risks. I've seen the disastrous impact neglect like this can have in the lives of clients for decades.

4. Find a vocation you can be passionate about.

It's critical that you choose a career that suits you and that you're well-equipped to do. You should enjoy what you're doing for work. Life is too short to spend years dreading what you do for a living.

I remember early on, when I was in the Navy, I thought briefly about becoming a doctor someday. I did some career testing and was

told that I wasn't ideally equipped to be a doctor. I'd need to work twice as hard as others to prosper in that field. He suggested I look in another direction, such as ministry and social work. That gentleman was right.

I'm so glad that God guided me toward ministry and counseling. I'm almost 80 now, and I still love what I do. My career has provided me with decades of fruitful work.

5. Find a hobby.

To have a successful life, you'll need a way to relax. For me, that's been through sports for much of my life. In my younger days, I enjoyed playing sports. (In fact, I played softball until I was 60 years old.) As I grew older, I played less, but I continued to enjoy watching others play. I've also enjoyed reading, particularly biographies and autobiographies. Without a way to relax, you'll be less healthy and less happy.

6. Do volunteer work.

I've always thought volunteer work was a great way to meet people. For Christians, it's also an ideal way to build relationships and witness to those who don't know the Lord. Volunteering in your community is a great way to help others and be a part of something bigger than yourself.

7. Laugh often.

I believe there is enough sadness in the world. As a counselor, I've heard my fair share of sadness. I certainly believe there is a place for those conversations as well but go out of your way to bring humor into your life. I enjoy telling funny stories. I enjoy a good, clean joke. Learning to laugh, and spending time with people who like to laugh, will transform your entire outlook on life.

8. Choose your friends wisely.

I try to avoid negative people. I don't mean that you shouldn't be there for people who are sad or going through tough times. I'm a counselor. I deal with struggling people all day long. But if people are negative or sarcastic all the time, I'd rather not be around them. Those kinds of relationships will rub off on you. Don't ignore people who need you, but don't let their negativity consume you either.

As I turn 80 years old, I still believe I have more good years left. God isn't through with me yet—far from it. I'm excited to see what He has in store for the coming years.

Looking back through these past eight decades, I can't believe the opportunities the Lord has given me. As I think back to the chaotic home life of that elementary-aged boy from Lebanon, Missouri, I couldn't have dreamed of the life he has given me. He has given me the love of two wonderful women. He graced me with four children and three grandchildren who make me beam with pride. He has provided the opportunity to do work I've loved and that has helped many others along the way.

Most of all, my Savior has walked through this life with me. For the past 60 years—through lows and highs, good times and bad—He has been my constant guide and support. I am forever grateful that He saved me and gave me a purpose for living.

Letters to JD

Dear Dad,

You've taught me so much throughout the years. It's hard to put all of those lessons into a few words. But I'd say the most important lesson you've taught me is to be available. You've shown that to me regularly throughout my life. Yes, you've been available to your family, but you've always been available to pretty much anyone else in need, too. You've been available even when it wasn't convenient for you. I think that's why, among many other reasons, so many people respect you.



I've witnessed you impact so many lives through the years—from those you've counseled to friends and neighbors to your family. Your calm, nonjudgmental personality makes you the perfect person to get advice from or a shoulder to cry on. I can't tell you how many times you've calmed my nerves when I've been frantic over a particular situation. In minutes you usually put me at ease.

In fact, I've seen you do this when you've been in stressful situations of your own. I remember one time when a lady poured enough gasoline around her property to blow the block up because she was

upset about people setting off fireworks. You didn't hesitate when they called you in to help. I sat in the car and watched you scale the wall, knock on her door, and go into the house to talk with her. I was scared you were going to get killed, but you were able to de-escalate the situation and end the stand-off.

I also appreciate your sense of humor. I'll never forget years ago when we were all on our way to AstroWorld. We were waiting behind a lady in the merge lane, but she was taking forever. You obviously thought she was passing on too many opportunities to merge into traffic, so you honked the horn. She immediately gave you the finger. You slowly pulled up and bumped her bumper. Mom freaked out, and so did the lady in the other car. You pushed her car forward a couple of feet until she gunned it and took off. It was surprising, but I loved it!

As I've grown older, I've become more grateful for the simple times of reflection between us. I'll never forget the times cooking catfish and sharing stories. I love listening to you tell stories about your life—like skipping school to see Elvis or being chased by the cop when you got caught skinny dipping in high school.

You've always made me feel special and loved. Thanks for everything.

I love you!

Jon

Dad,

I can think of a variety of things I've learned from you during the years, but maybe the most important are what I've learned about being a husband and father. In a nutshell, I'd point to one specific word I've heard you mention frequently over the last 20 years—accommodation. It's a word that comes in handy on a regular basis, in my relationships with my wife, my coworkers, and my kids. It's the idea that you don't always have to get exactly what you want because if you do, then the person on the other end probably isn't.

I guess to use another word, you've taught me to serve, to put others in front of myself. I've become a better husband, father, and coworker because of that lesson.



I also often think back to how you and mom raised us boys. You didn't always see everything the same way. You had different parenting strategies sometimes. But you always worked together, and you always parented with intentionality. I always felt like that intentionality was about making life better for us.

You've always modeled a deep interest in learning. You never stopped my curiosity. You always gave me room to be creative and let my imagination grow. Even as I'm in my 40s today, you're still passing on resources to me that help me learn and grow.

You've taught me not to divide artificially the sacred and the secular in my learning. I remember how you went to New York years ago to learn from Albert Ellis, a very significant and very secular therapist. You took what you could from him and applied what you knew about the Bible to make yourself a better Christian counselor. In doing so, you taught me how to take what I've learned in a physical, secular world in a way that helps people and points them to Christ.

I've tried to mirror that in what I do. I don't preach when I'm in class, but I get to have conversations with my students in office hours and other places that helps them make sense of the natural world in light of who God is and what Christ has done for us. I've learned how to do that from you.

Dad, I'm so grateful for how you anchored our family after Mom's death. For many years she was the glue that held our family together. When she passed, it was very painful for us. I'm sure it was even more painful for you, but you took the time to get counseling for your own grief so you could help us with ours. You never pushed, but you always reminded us of the value of dealing with loss constructively.

Thank you for realizing that your role as a parent didn't end when I moved out of the house. Your "adult parenting" has been beyond what I could have imagined or even knew I needed.

Thank you, Dad!

Joel

Dear Mr. J.D.,

I've only known you as an adult, so I probably see you a bit differently than your kids do. To me, you've always been a calming force, wise and in control at all times. That's why some of my favorite memories are when you break from this norm and let your true emotions leak out.

One example of this came at our wedding. We were both excited to have you, someone who knew both of us well, to officiate the wedding. When we had the rehearsal the night before, we didn't talk through some of the details that other couples may, we mostly went through who walked where at what time. We never actually "performed" the whole ceremony. That's why I was surprised when after you greeted those in the congregation, you mentioned that we were all gathered here with friends and family and "those who had gone before us." Then you broke your normal demeanor and began to tear up. You couldn't speak for a moment. Then Joel and I also began to tear up.

Those in the audience who knew Mrs. Jean had passed away only a few years before realized the significance of those words, and there was a brief silence. Then just as quickly as the burst of emotion came, you took a breath and continued on as if nothing happened. You provided us with an extremely fun and personal wedding ceremony, as you joked about the two of us being raised by military fathers and school-teacher moms. I've always marveled at your ability to pull yourself together so quickly. But I've always loved the fact that sometimes your emotions leak through, and you simply go with the flow.

Another humorous time when I saw your emotions leak out happened on a trip to Kansas City, Missouri, about a year or so after you and Linda married. The two of you were in your car leading the way. Joel, Jon and I, all in our twenties, were following in the car behind you. Linda had purchased walkie talkies for the trip so we could stay in contact with each other for the long drive.

Along the way, Linda would get on the walkie talkies and tell us stories about when she lived in Kansas City and how beautiful the

city was because it was “so full of fountains.” She talked about how the nickname for Kansas City was “City of Fountains,” and there were fountains on many city blocks. She would periodically tell us stories of different fountains or of the history of the “City of Fountains.” When we got closer to the city, she radioed in to make sure we were all awake so we could look at all the beautiful fountains.

I don’t know if we took a strange route through the city, but we didn’t see any fountains—none. We looked and looked and didn’t see a single one. It didn’t take long for the three of us “kids” in the second car to start laughing about the whole incident. We started teasing Linda over the walkie talkies saying, “Oh there’s one! Oh, wait.... No.” “Oh, look at all the fountains! So many fountains!” We all thought we were so hilarious, but I don’t believe Linda found it as amusing as we did.



Finally, you picked up the walkie talkie to reprimand us and get us to stop, but you couldn’t quit laughing. You were giggling so hard yourself that you could only get out a few words of “okay, now stop” before you burst out into laughter. Listening to you try to stifle your giggles while defending your new wife is one of my favorite memories.

I’ve always appreciated your wisdom, and I’ve seen it in action

so many times throughout the years. You have so much knowledge, particularly in the areas of religion and counseling, which have always been interesting to me. I remember after graduating from Louisiana College with a religion minor, I had a lot of religious questions in the first year after graduation. You and I started writing letters back and forth and talking through many of those questions. You passed on so much wisdom to me during that time—and you have continued to do so ever since! Some people answer religious questions with information they've heard someone else share in sermons. When you answered my questions, you did so from years of studying the Bible and different theologians. You gave such in-depth explanations. I learned as much from you as I did my professors during college.

Thank you, Mr. J.D., for your influence on our marriage, too. You've always modeled an example of romance for Joel and me. I admire how you open the car door for Linda and always fill up her gas tank, so she doesn't have to get her hands dirty. Even when Joel and I were dating, you would take my car to get it filled up for my return trip to Louisiana when I'd come to see you guys.

I remember once, after you and Linda married, you came down to Florida while Joel was in the Florida Keys doing research for his PhD. Joel's research involved collecting the spawns from the coral reefs when they released their zygotes, and Joel needed to cover each coral with women's pantyhose, which was the only thing he had found fine enough to capture the tiny organisms.

So, you accompanied Joel to a ladies' lingerie store. While Joel was looking at the different weaves and thicknesses of the pantyhose in one aisle, you wandered off to look around the store. When Joel got in line to pay for the pantyhose, you came up behind him holding a lingerie set. Joel gave you a surprised look, but you just shrugged saying, "What? I'm a newlywed."

Thank you for welcoming me into your family so gracefully. You've always treated me as one of the family. You've always made me feel as much a part of the family traditions as your sons.

I remember one time when Joel and I were engaged, we had gotten into a difficult argument. We had, in essence, broken up. Both of us were devastated. Joel called you for advice. He later told me that, after he shared with you the whole story, you took my side and gave him some sound fatherly advice. You also told him that if we broke up, your preference would be to keep me and to disown Joel! I always appreciated that!

Thank you so much for your friendship and care over the last 20 years!

Love, Kristi

MY STORY

Hi Pop!

I have some terrific memories of spending time with you and Nana when you would visit us.



I'd say one of my favorite memories came when we lived in New Hampshire. You always enjoyed visiting Parker's Maple Barn when you were with us there.



After breakfast, you and Nana would take us to the old-fashioned store for a treat. Even though Mom and Dad always told us we wouldn't get anything except a snack, we never left that store without a sack full of candy or a toy. Those trips were so much fun!

Love, Evie .

Hey Pop!

I like making you laugh! Some of my favorite activities with you are doing magic tricks, sharing silly jokes, and dancing. I love acting goofy and making you laugh at what I'm doing.



Thank you for being such a great audience!

Love, Van

MY STORY

Dear Pop,

From the moment you came into my life 20 years ago, you've demonstrated time and time again that you're kind, thoughtful and attentive. You've always been faithful to listen to my frustrations and questions. When you give opinions or advice, it comes with my best intentions in mind, as if you truly want to help.

I remember a few years back when Chuck and I were struggling, and I came to your house. Chuck came by later. In the midst of the conflict, you were able to bring calm to the situation. Thank you for being there during that time.

I also remember you and mom buying me a Christmas tree when I got my first apartment, and you gave me a "Jesus Loves You" ornament for the tree. It was such a special gift! Thank you for doing that.

I'm grateful for how you've incorporated me into the family traditions you've done with your sons, particularly at Christmas. I always laugh at the crazy pajamas (and boxers for the boys) you get us.



As a mom, I particularly appreciate how proud you are to be a grandfather. You like to brag on all three of your grandchildren's

achievements. Some of my favorite memories of the last 16 years are you taking Chandler to watch the airplanes in Little Rock and watching you walk proudly with him during the Veteran's Day parade when he was in elementary school. You've cheered faithfully for him when he has played baseball, soccer, basketball or football. You've always made it a priority to be there for Chandler's many choir concerts at church and school.

I also appreciate how you treat my mom. Your relationship is what God intends for marriage—both honorable and loving, while still allowing each other some give and take.

I'm so glad God brought you into our lives!

Jennifer

MY STORY

Hey Pop,

I'm not sure I've ever told you just how much your support has meant to me in the last 20 years. As you know, I lost my father at age 24, at about the same time I met you. I'm so grateful that God provided you when He did.



You've treated me like a son for as long as I've known you. Sometimes that means you've had tough conversations with me when I needed them. When I was struggling to deal with an injury a few years ago and was dealing with some related mental-health challenges, you were there to put me on the straight and narrow.

Thank you, Pop. You're a man of integrity, wisdom, and faithfulness. I'm so grateful for your impact on my life.

Chuck

Dear Pop,

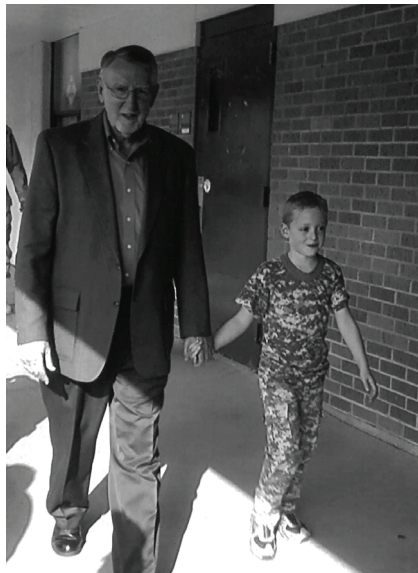
Thank you for everything you've done for me and for your service in the Navy. You've been a great, caring role model for me. You've always been there when I needed you.



You're also so much fun to be around. I really enjoyed going to Blanchard Springs and playing water guns with you.

I'll also never forget the day you baptized me. It made that day even more special because you were such a big part of it.

Thank you, Pop, for everything! ~ *Chandler*



Happy 80th Birthday, J.D.!

I have had the privilege of knowing you for 77 years. When I think of you, I am reminded of the many things I appreciate about you.

You joined the United States Navy upon your graduation from high school. When I graduated from high school, two years after you, we ended up being stationed together in Pensacola, Florida. During that time, we served our country together. We also shared the same barracks, had “chow” time together, and enjoyed going to the beach during our free time. It was nice serving alongside you.

You and I also attended church services together. It was at a small tent revival where you and I surrendered our lives and accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. What a memorable time.

When you completed your service with the United States Navy, you embarked upon a new journey. You submitted to the call of ministry and furthered your education in becoming a counselor and ultimately receiving your doctorate.

You are a man of the Lord. You are honest, loyal, kind, compassionate and soft-spoken. You have demonstrated throughout your ministry that you can not only listen, but you can “hear.”

Throughout my own life, during difficult trials and tribulations, you have always been a source of encouragement to me. You’ve listened and were never judgmental nor critical. You were never one to tell a person what to do, but while being encouraging you would give different options on how to resolve conflicts or difficult situations. I believe that is one of your strongest attributes.

I am truly honored to call you brother, Reverend Stake.

Happy birthday J.D.!

Love, Charles

J.D. STAKE



J.D.'s Siblings. Joan, John, James, Becky, Charlie, J.D.

Dear J.D.,

As I sit down to write my remembrances and the impact you have had on my life, I find myself at a loss for words. Where do I begin? We have always lived in separate areas, but I knew I could count on you. No matter what! We have been through the highs and lows of our lives together. Many of which have etched fond memories in my mind.

I'm not sure I have ever told you how much I respect and admire you. You have such a calming and unbiased demeanor, which makes everyone around you feel at ease.

Tami and I will always cherish the memories of our trip with you to Egypt, Israel and Italy. What a fun time! You made it very special with your explanations and knowledge of the biblical times and places — the swimming in the Dead Sea, sharing communion at the Garden Tomb while experiencing the miracle of a snowfall, visiting the Egyptian pyramids, the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy; I could just go on and on.

We were very grateful to have you officiate the weddings of our three children as you were their first and only choice. Hope you know how special they felt that you took the time to marry them, demonstrating again your “giving nature.”

At the lowest point of my life, you were there. You gave me strength, security, compassion and most importantly, brotherly love. Whether we are celebrating our triumphs or supporting each other in sorrow, you have always been a constant in my life. For that I will always be grateful.

Happy 80th Birthday!

Love you, Becky

Dear J.D.,

Even though I was only four years old when you left for the Navy and didn't get the chance to grow up with you, I'm so grateful to have you as a big brother. You've been a great encouragement to me throughout the years. In May 1973, you gave the baccalaureate address for my high school graduation. You encouraged me to pursue my dream of becoming a classroom teacher. Your encouragement in that meant so much to me.

You've also modeled to me what it looks like to have a daily walk with Jesus and encouraged me to follow Jesus as well. You've always been available anytime I've needed you—day or night! The needs of others have come first for you.

Thank you for being a big brother who walks with Jesus and encourages others to follow Him, too.

Love,

Joan

Dear J.D.,

I was young when you left for the Navy, so I don't remember much of you being at home with the rest of us. I do remember that you tended to get aggravated with me when I tore some of your stuff up! (Hey, what else are little brothers for?)

I remember when you and Jean came home for the first time that we went as a family to Blanchard Springs. That was a lot of fun.

When you and Jean moved back to Searcy, it seemed like everyone knew you. I was always introduced as J.D.'s little brother. In fact, one day when someone said that to me, I spoke up and said, "I have a first name!"

You've always been a great encourager. I remember one particular time I was going through a tough time, and you were there to support me through it. You also helped me find a professional counselor to help me.

If I have to be known as someone's little brother, I'm glad it's you!

Thank you, J.D.

John

Dear J.D.,

You've always made me so proud to be your little brother. I was young when you graduated high school and left for the Navy, but I remember you coming home with some great stories. I was very proud to have a big brother in the service. Then, when God called you into the ministry while you were in the Navy, I remember that I thought it was really neat that my big brother was going to be a preacher.

Then you came to preach at our church numerous times when I was a kid. I was very proud of the enthusiasm and passion you demonstrated in your messages. As you continued your education and attended seminary, I noticed how much more organized your messages were and how carefully you made your points. I was very proud. Then, as you started working on your PhD, I began teasing you about your sermons. You liked to use big words that I was sure were over the heads of the people in our small church. Of course, I was just kidding! I was still incredibly proud of how you presented and taught God's Word.

After I got out of college and began my banking career, I came back to our hometown. As I dealt with the leaders of our business community, I began to encounter many people who knew you and had been friends and teammates with you during your high school days. The first question they would ask me was if I was related to you or if you were my dad. They didn't remember you had such a young brother.

Then the next question was always the exact same. "Is it true he is a preacher"? As I confirmed you were a preacher, they all seemed amazed and told me they never could have guessed that's the direction you went. They went on to share some rowdy, edgy stories of mischief from your younger days.

Of course, by today's standards, none of it was that bad. Everyone I met had good things to say about your personality and how much they enjoyed being friends with you.

Throughout the many years as our family grew and experienced the many challenges that life brings to us, you've become the family

MY STORY

counselor and often guided each of us through these times. You have become the patriarch of the family and are a calming spirit that we all look to when we are down.

You never beat us over the head with religion but steadfastly show us what it looks like to be Christlike.

I am very proud of you, big brother!

James

Dear J.D.,

You were uniquely qualified and suited for the role of a single adult minister and counselor when you arrived at First Baptist Church of Lafayette, Louisiana. Not only had you pastored small churches for several years in south Louisiana, but maybe equally important, you had been hired by Sheriff Romero to create and head the juvenile division of the Iberia Parish Sheriff's Office. I think single adults are a lot like "juvies"!

You had the counseling education and the demeanor to comfort and guide people when needed and the spiritual heart, based upon scripture, to help people focus on the bigger picture. You also knew when to call something "hogwash" when you were fed a line. But you did so in a manner where the recipient of the rebuke knew you were looking out for his or her best interest as well as the best interest of the entire ministry. When personalities among individuals clashed, you would discretely deal with them to maintain a positive and welcoming feel for the integrity of the group dynamic. You reflected biblical principles and did what was right even when it wasn't popular. You were always God's man for the task.

Your ministry worked because you cared about people and knew how to create interest in what we were doing. You drew out the best in the leaders of our ministry. You developed singles conferences in Lafayette and brought in great speakers to help give useful knowledge to single- adult issues. You would take anyone to the statewide singles conferences who wished to go. The singles groups were fun and drew people in from outside of the church. All were welcome.

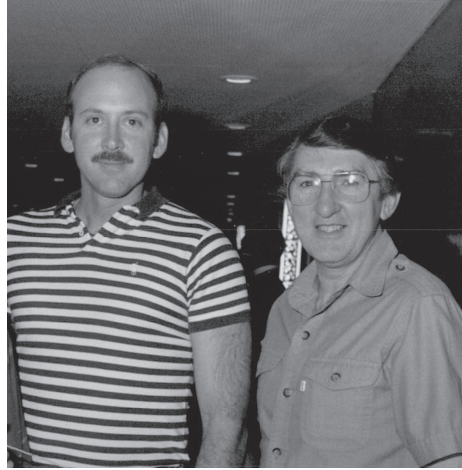
One of the things I've always appreciated about you is your sense of humor. I remember how you would watch an interaction between a guy (sometimes me) and girl and just roll your eyes while laughing. Jean was a great help (co-conspirator) to you. She had my number and knew how to tease me to no end. She could just look at me with a certain grinning "look," and then she would start to laugh and I would

blush. She frequently did this while I was talking to a female at a conference. It worked every time for her. I think I was her pet “project.” I’d often see you just laughing at our interactions.

Remember how I cost you a \$50 bet? You bet one of our friends that I would be married by age 40. You believed in me and said I certainly would. By the time I turned 40, I was living in another state, but the bet hadn’t been forgotten. On my 40th birthday, you received a phone call from our friend who simply said, “Pay up!”

Because of your leadership and the atmosphere you cultivated, many from the singles group in Lafayette have remained friends to this day.

I count you as one of my best friends. The bonds we formed in Lafayette have survived the test of time. I always cherish our talks and visits, marveling at how we always can pick up where we left off as though it were yesterday. When I finally did get married at 44 years of age, I was blessed that you performed my wedding.



*J.D. Stake & Jack Madeley, FBC
Lafayette Singles Ministry 1984*

You always said you were thinking of writing a book about your experiences, but you promised to change the names to protect the guilty. You said I’d recognize myself scattered throughout the book, but you thought my version might be somewhat different from yours.

I’m sure my version is in my head only!

God bless, my friend.

Your friend always,

Jack Madeley

Dear J.D.,

I'm so grateful for how God used you to minister to First Baptist Church of Batesville, Arkansas, when we needed your help a few years back. As an intentional interim pastor at our church, you led us to better health and more effective ministry. You are a scripturally sound, wise adviser, who is comfortable working with individuals and entire churches.

I appreciate how you guide people to meaningful solutions while holding firm to non-negotiable outcomes. You were always a straight shooter with us. We knew where you stood on a broad range of issues, which helped us stay on firm ground as we worked to solve tough problems.

We saw you persevere as you followed the Spirit's leadership when lesser men would have just thrown in the towel. You were the right man, at the right time, to lead our church to a place of healing and restoration.

We had many hurting people on both sides of issues when you arrived at our church. You patiently listened to all sides of the issues and then led us through Ken Sande's study, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*. As we worked through the study, church members confronted and dealt with the many sources of anger and hurt that held us back for years. I'll never forget how that effort culminated in a worship service where people wrote their greatest hurts and disappointments on pieces of paper and nailed them to a large wooden cross. That was a turning point in our church.

Thank you, J.D., for leading our church to a place of health and growth. I'm confident that people will benefit from your ministry at First Baptist Batesville for generations to come.

Best wishes,

Gene Tulberg

Dear J.D.,

When the Arkansas Baptist State Convention started looking for a counselor to pastors, staff members, and their families in the early 1990s, we wanted to find someone who had genuine spiritual depth and demonstrated counseling experience. When we discovered you and your experience with Dr. Perry Sanders at First Baptist Church of Lafayette, it was obvious that you were a man “without guile” (John 1:47). As we watched you interact with Jean, we could see God had blessed you to put together a good family and were one who could be trusted to help the families of the Baptist church leaders in Arkansas.

You ended up as a terrific choice for our convention. You helped many church leaders throughout our state become spiritually and emotionally healthy so they could more effectively minister in their communities.

I’m convinced that God uniquely qualified you to minister to the Baptist leaders of Arkansas. First, your humble beginnings helped you to identify with anyone who might come to you. Your effort to prepare and succeed personally meant that you could identify with people who may struggle and labor long without much recognition. I am also thankful to say that in all of those years of dealing with painful and sensitive matters related to our church leaders, you never once violated a confidence or shared information that would be detrimental to anyone or the cause of Christ.

Your life in the military gave you a sense of discipline and an understanding of people who spend a lot of their lives in the secular world, which may not be friendly to their faith.

Your meek and quiet spirit, which accompanied your spiritual gift of counseling, had to be a true gift from God. Jesus said early on, “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5)

You were also a team player, who blessed and encouraged everyone with whom you worked. You could always be counted on to be a loyal helper, friend, and a compatriot in our battle.

Maybe the best indication of how effective you were in your ministry in Arkansas was that, in all of those years, I never once heard a complaint about your ministry.

To me though, you were more than just a coworker. You were a friend. When my first wife was thrown into a crisis with cancer, your quiet manner, sincere concern, and shared grief made you a solid friend for me. It was my privilege to return the favor when you walked through a similar season when Jean had cancer.

Thank you, J.D., for your ministry to Arkansas Baptists and your friendship with me.

Don Moore

Dear Dr. Stake,

Six years ago, when my husband and I moved back to Arkansas with our three children, we were a ministry family that was trying to heal from weariness and wounds. Basically, we were starting over to rebuild our lives in a new place. Through God's providence, we were guided to you. You have been instrumental in encouraging and advising us in different ways. Even today, we continue to seek your counsel. You have even influenced the lives of our children as well. You are a genuine friend to our family who has all of our best interests at heart.

Of course, you've also been my supervisor for the past three years as I've pursued my professional counselor's license with the state of Arkansas. As we've met regularly during this time, you've provided great insight as we've discussed my clients, their progress, and possible interventions and methods that would help in their healing journey. You have advised me in matters of ethics and professional conduct in our field.

At the Calvary Counseling Center over the last few years, I have been able to co-counsel multiple couples for marital issues with you and collaborated over several individual clients. I recognize the opportunity to work alongside someone with your experience is rare. Most supervisees in my position would not have such access to their mentors.

I am extremely grateful God gave me an opportunity to work with you during this season of your career. I know you've said I'll be your last supervisee. I am completely convinced that this is a divine appointment for my life. To my knowledge, you are the most accomplished licensed counselor in our state within the Christian community.

Your wisdom and the variety of experiences and roles you've held make you invaluable to those of us in this calling and profession. Despite all of your incredible accomplishments, you are a man of gracious humility. I am in awe of your quiet spirit and close walk with our Lord.

J. D. STAKE

I truly treasure your professional guidance and consider my time with you a gift from God that He is using to refine and sharpen me.

Thank you for everything, Dr. Stake!

Jan Gaddis

Dear J.D.,

When I came to you as a client more than 30 years ago, I was broken and had just about given up. I had just unexpectedly experienced a divorce, and I didn't see any hope for my future. You listened to me and showed me that I had value. You showed me that I was more than a divorcee.

I became a better person because of your willingness to be there for me and guide me into looking at myself as a worthwhile person.

Working with you for nearly 10 years, I got to see your ministry firsthand. I know you were available to people who needed you anytime, day or night. I remember people calling who were suicidal, and you'd leave your home to help them through that dark period.

When you took on a client, you were there for the whole family. I remember times when my children were having problems, and I didn't know where else to turn. You were willing to be there by phone anytime I needed you.

Working with you was an experience I will never forget. I grew as a person because of that time. I had never been a secretary before. I had never worked in an office. I remember the day you called me and asked about becoming your secretary. I was nervous about the new role. You told me, "Anybody can be a secretary, but it takes a certain person to be in the office of a counselor." I can't describe how much it encouraged me that you trusted me enough to offer me that position.

Being a part of your life and the life of your family has brightened my life. Because of you, I actually have a life today. There was a time when I wanted to give up, and you showed me how not to give up and how to keep moving on. And you helped me to have self-worth and to be strong enough to use what God saw me go through to be able to be there for others.

I'll never forget all the laughs we've had and the trips we went on as a group. J.D., my life would have never been the same if God had not brought me to you for what I needed at the time. First Baptist

J. D. STAKE

Church of Lafayette was so blessed to have you as part of its ministry.

Thank you for everything you've done. Tippy and I love you so much, and we will never forget you. We're here if you ever need us.

God bless you!

Debbie Jeffreys



J. D. and Jean Stake, Tippy and Debbie Jeffreys FBC Lafayette Singles Ministry

MY STORY



*Front row: Jennifer, J. D., Evie, Van, Linda & Kristi
Second row: Chuck, Chandler, Jay, Jon, & Joel - 5/26/17*

