An Embarrassment of Riches: Paradoxes of Growing up Pentecostal

Diane Awbrey

June 2018 Draft

Introduction

A high-pitched wail like the long screech from a tea kettle in full boil pierced the silence. It came from the pew directly in front of us. My friend Georgia gasped, jumped, and gripped my knee with her hand, her manicured nails digging into my skin. Georgia and I had met in graduate school a couple of years before, and we had linked up in St. Louis this particular weekend for a mini-reunion. We were attending a college choir concert in an Assemblies of God church in St. Louis featuring students from the Bible school where I was on faculty. The choir had just finished a throaty and sombre rendition of "Great is Thy Faithfulness," and a holy hush had settled on the crowd assembled in the mid-1980s pie-shaped auditorium.

Overpowered by the Presence in the room, the middle-aged woman in front of us, in her pink and blue polyester print dress and mousy brown bouffant hair, shook a wrinkled hanky over her head, trilling and wailing in joyful, babbling ecstasy. For me, a fourth-generation Pentecostal, this response, although not typical, was not startling. For Georgia, an Eastern Orthodox Christian, the surprise nearly knocked her off the pew. And then the worst happened: We got the giggles. Hers from embarrassment and surprise; mine from seeing the absurdity of such an outburst as it must appear to her.

As the daughter of a Pentecostal preacher, I had been in more raucous services than a choir concert in St. Louis. And from all accounts, the experiences I had had were tame compared to those in the "old days" of my Pentecostal parents and grandparents. In their experience, people survived falling on hot stoves in the center of a sawdust-strewn tent or knocking their heads on rough-hewn benches as they were slain in the Spirit and fell to the ground in a trance-like state. Jericho

marches—with much waving and shouting as the congregation trooped around the sanctuary—healing lines, and testimony services were the norm. Most services I had attended included at least one person shouting: the preacher under the anointing, a little old lady like the one who had felt the Spirit come upon her in St. Louis, or a song leader exuberantly leading "I'll Fly Away" or "Power in the Blood." In every service, during prayer time, every person in the congregation vied for God's attention through vigorously loud prayer in English and in indecipherable syllables known as "praying in tongues." Pentecostalism, at its core, is an emotion-charged tradition.

At the turn of the century, my great-grandmother Clara Musgrove (d. 1927) encountered the Baptism in the Holy Spirit in early "revivals" on the dusty plains of Western Kansas. Charles Parham's 1901 revival in Topeka, Kansas, spread like prairie fire through the state, and several pockets of "Holy Rollers," as they were called, had sprung up in rural communities. Aimee Semple McPherson preached and healed her way across the state, and several small churches of other traditions, including my great-grandmother's Church of the Brethren, felt the spark of Pentecost kindle their congregations.

As soon as Great-grandma Clara was thoroughly converted, she began to pray for her son Berry. Lean-faced and spare-framed, Berry was a liquor-drinkin', woman chasin' gambler. His wife Lutie had died in childbirth, and he had reverted to what the Pentecostals called the distractions of "the world." When his mother Clara invited a local school teacher, Ruby Hays, to attend church with her, however, the Holy Spirit may have found a chink in his armor of resistance.

Ruby (1906 – 1984) was the youngest of the 23 children of James Hays, the last daughter of his second wife. Her father was 51 when she was born. Her mother died when she was 12, and her father, James, when she was 14. Petted and spoiled by older siblings, Ruby was befriended by Clara Musgrove. Clara's son, Berry, who lived in the same boarding house as Ruby, encouraged the relationship between the women but dragged his feet on attending church, still angry with a God who had allowed his first wife to die.

Regularly, faithfully, and loudly, in her Pentecostal way, his mother prayed for him. Early in the mornings, on his way from the bar to his room at a boarding house, he passed his mother's small-frame bungalow. Sometimes, he could hear through the open window her pleas to God for his salvation. Although he had been out most of the night, drinking and carousing, and was just heading home to sleep, his mother was up early, pleading with God for his lost soul. Eventually the Holy Spirit found His way into Berry's heart. When he finally relented and prayed the sinner's prayer, my Grandpa Berry was instantly delivered from his addictions to alcohol, gambling, and womanizing and called into full-time ministry. In 1925, he and my Grandma Ruby married.

Thus began my family's journey with Pentecostalism. Berry and Ruby had six children: Leota, Robert, Derald, Marva, Donny and Roger. My parents, Derald Musgrove and Peggy Collins, both children of the depression and too young to participate in World War II, were raised on prairie revivalism in Pentecostal homes. They met at Central Bible Institute in Springfield, Missouri, preparing for ministry in the Assemblies of God. They graduated and married in the summer of 1951, spending their honeymoon as church camp counselors on opposite sides of the camp ground. This is true Christian commitment!

By the time my sister and I joined the family, my dad had become a youth leader in the Kansas District Council of the Assemblies of God, where he and mom would eventually serve a total of 39 years in ministry at every level of district leadership. All we knew, growing up, was church on Sunday morning, church on Sunday night, church on Wednesday night, and youth group as often as we could manage to congregate. Our church calendar held two major events a year: five weeks of summer camp in June and July and youth convention at Thanksgiving. Every two years, we made the trek with thousands of others to General Council, the biennial business meeting for the whole fellowship. My formative years pre-date the Charismatic Renewal of the 1970s, so my earliest experiences resonate deeply with both the enthusiasms and the excesses of early Pentecostalism.

Because we were so entrenched in the inner workings of the fellowship, I came to accept many practices of the faith without question. I had only one close non-A/G friend in grade school. I balanced my church friends with my non-church friends in high school, and eventually, I became an undergraduate at an A/G college. Although I sometimes questioned certain practices of our tradition, usually when I couldn't go to school dances or run to the latest movie with my school friends, I generally found the Pentecostal world I lived in a happy, safe, and nurturing place to thrive. I experienced a richness of spiritual teachings, social variety, and to a certain extent some cultural diversity through the stories and experiences of missionaries.

But in graduate school, I finally began to see the world from the point of view of those outside the movement. For the first time in my life, I would introduce myself without expecting to hear the familiar, "Musgrove, huh? Is your dad . . ."? In fact, I realized I had developed a hitch between my names during introductions. "Hi, my name is Diane (*wait for it, wait for it . . .*) Musgrove," because inevitably the questions of family lineage would begin. At the University of Missouri, no one—absolutely no one—had ever heard of my dad, nor did they care that he was a minister. Slowly, I began to see how people outside the bubble that had been my Pentecostal upbringing viewed our insular world. Thus, at that St. Louis concert, my friend Georgia's unfiltered reaction to the Pentecostal message in tongues gave me a rare glimpse into what we must look like to others.

To outside eyes, I discovered, Pentecostal practices of my childhood were embarrassing. Boisterous singing, shouting, preaching, weeping and noisy altar services—to outsiders, these are the practices of people who lack control, rationality, dignity. My high school friend, Cindy, raised in the formal, hushed tones of Congregationalism, finally confessed (40 years later) her revulsion and fear when she attended her first Pentecostal service with me. Yes, the tradition was fraught with emotionalism, legalism, anti-intellectualism, celebrity worship, and an outdated, fear-driven dispensationalism. In spite of these deficiencies, it is the rich and fertile ground in which my love of God, my faith in Christ, and my joy in literature, music, and other intellectual pursuits were allowed to grow.

After much reflection, rejection, and rumination on the practices of my childhood faith tradition, I find that truth runs like a nutritious vein of truffles throughout the roots of my Pentecostal heritage.

Today I hold a Ph.D. in Renaissance literature. I'm married to an Episcopalian journalist (try to guess which of *those* monikers my parents were most skeptical of). Although at one time or another I have attended almost every type of Christian church —Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, Church of Christ, Quaker, Congregational—I have never really left my Pentecostal roots. After all that wandering, I find myself back in the heartland of the Assemblies of God teaching at an Assemblies of God university where I try to instill in my students the value of their Christian faith integrated with the highest of liberal arts ideals.

The question is how did I get here? How did I make the transition from growing up in a Pentecostal preacher's home to achieving an advanced degree in literature from a secular university without casting aside my denominational birth certificate or losing my faith?

The answer for me came not from rejecting my faith or cultural upbringing but by processing it. Like hunting for truffles in the gnarly roots and matted underbrush of a European forest, I found the delectable truths in my Pentecostal upbringing lying under the loam of 30 years of constant changes in church practice, layers of literary forays, and my own trekking in and out of the tradition. Although I may not always attend an intentionally Pentecostal church or fully practice my faith within a Pentecostal community, I find the foundations of my faith have been well-nurtured in the full gospel of Pentecostalism.

A series of paradoxes informed my intellectual and spiritual development. Where others saw emotionalism, I discovered relationship; where others saw legalism, I found liberty in obedience; where others encountered anti-intellectualism, I received a reverence for words and the Word; where others promoted celebrity, I learned humility; where others panhandled fear, I learned the practical wisdom of faith, hope, and love. A rich inheritance indeed. The narrative of that journey lies within the pages of this book. 1800+

Don't Check Your Mind at the Door: Emotionalism

1 Salvation

My five-year-old knees scraped lightly on the concrete floor as organ music filled the cavernous, airplane-hangar-shaped tabernacle of the Wheat State Camp near Augusta, Kansas. It was family camp week 1965, one of the most joyous and sacred weeks of our year.

My mom was playing the organ, my dad was roaming the platform occasionally stopping to lay hands on and pray for people kneeling in front who had responded to the recent message by moving from their seats to the wooden benches that served as altars. My sister and I had been sitting through the service with Grandma Ruby and Grandpa Berry in the congregation. After the earlier coolness of the metal chairs and the open-air fans blowing summer pollen through the auditorium during the service, now the dry grit of the dusty floor sharpened my attention to the moment. I knelt at my folding-chair altar like my grandmother and all the other adults around me. It was what you did at the end of the service. While penitents sought God under the guidance of the platform preachers, the rest of us prayed on our knees near our chairs. Prayer time. Time to reflect on the sermon and make its truth your own.

I don't remember the sermon or who preached it. I don't remember the final challenge from the pulpit. I don't remember the specific altar call. But I remember the sound of my Grandma alternately speaking in tongues and English, praying for her family, praying for her lost relatives, praising her savior for His goodness to her. I began to cry. Not big sobbing tears, but silent, slow tears of love and joy.

Suddenly, Grandma's hot, damp voice breathed in my ear. "Do you need your momma?" I shook my head. "Are you upset?" No. "Do you need to go to the bathroom?" Not at all. "Are you crying because you love Jesus?" I searched the rooms in my mind, and realized that she had opened the door to the one explanation of my emotion that made sense to me. Jesus was there. I didn't need my mother. I didn't need a bathroom. I didn't even need my grandmother's attention. Jesus was all I could see in my five-year-old mind. He stood in my imagination, compelling me to love

Him, to be with Him, to acknowledge Him. I nodded. Yes, I was crying because I realized I loved Jesus. That's the closest I come to a conversion story.

At five years old, I could hardly testify to any dark and dangerous habits, any willfully destructive behavior, any addictions or abuses. Well, there was that time when I was very little—probably my earliest memory—when my family were headed out the garage door to the car. I toddled along ahead of my parents and saw the neighbor, Francie, in her yard next door, separated from our yard by the garden hose snaking its way through the grass. I wanted to go to Francie. I liked Francie. She was fun. My mom's voice cut through my thoughts, "Diane, don't go over there. We're leaving now." I hesitated. "Diane, stay on this side of the hose." In my baby mind, seeing Francie was more important to me than going to the car, so over the slithering hose I stepped.

Instantly, I was decisively swept off my feet by my dad and carried back into the garage to face my mom. Both mom and dad sat on the single step between the garage and the house, with me, the accused, in front of them. My dad looked me in the eye and asked if I knew that I had done wrong. Then came the talking to, the mild spanking, and the prayer we prayed for Jesus to make me a better girl. That's it. That's the worst thing I can remember doing before I saw Jesus standing in my mind at age five. (I'm sure my sister can suggest other, worse transgressions.) So from an early age, conversion for me was not about turning away from something but moving toward someone. Eventually I learned that I was moving toward Jesus as he had appeared in my mind that dusty night at family camp.

Years later, when I read Psalm 16, "I have set the Lord always before me," I understood. For a person like my grandfather, long steeped in sin, the conversion experience is usually described in dramatic, emotional terms. But for a child brought up "in the way" as I was, the move from sin to grace is often more logical than dramatic. This lack of emotion in conversion confused me for a long time. Urgent appeals from the pulpit, emotionally charged altar calls, and even the occasional passionate decision for Christ I witnessed others make sometimes caused me to doubt my

own standing in the faith. If I had not "felt" a change, experienced a dramatic deliverance as my grandfather had, how could I know that my conversion had "taken"?

My Episcopalian husband has pointed out, however, that if the orientation of the services were any indication, Pentecostals never seem to mature in the faith. I was shocked and offended by this observation until he explained that because every service ends with a call to salvation, the message seems to be that congregants endlessly re-start their faith journey every week. Where is the progress? Where is the assumption of personal discipline and growth? The basic message each Sunday was (and still is in many holiness churches) for the lost to be found, not for the found to go deep.

Now I realize this pattern is a hold-over from the early days of Pentecost when people were flocking to fledgling churches and hearing for the first time, in the most passionate language, that they had a personal responsibility for their relationship with Christ. In many cases, conversion is the most dramatic and emotional experience of the Christian life, so the early Pentecostal focus on converting sinners perpetuated the idea of dramatic moves of the Spirit. Always with the hope that at least ONE sinner may be sitting in the congregation at any given service.

In spite of the persistent focus on the dramatic, the emotionalism of the faith emphasized for me the personal nature of my relationship with Jesus Christ. Although Pentecostal preachers loved to focus on spontaneity as evidence of the move of the Spirit, every service really had only one purpose: seeing souls come to Christ. That goal resulted in the recurrent altar call. Non-Pentecostals may be familiar with this phenomenon from watching Billy Graham Crusades, each of which closes with a plea for people to signify their intent to serve Jesus by heading to the front while the choir sings "Just as I am." Such calls to commitment were part and parcel of every Pentecostal service. Many preachers' kids raised in the A/G recount in adulthood the number of times they were "saved" because they were often moved by the impassioned message of repentance on successive Sunday nights. 1100

Don't Check Your Mind at the Door: Emotionalism

2 Holy Spirit Baptism

The distinctive characteristic of a Pentecostal experience is the Baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues. Among all other Christian practices, water baptism most marks the believer as a Christ-follower. In Catholicism, Lent and Easter are all about renewing baptismal vows. In some versions of the Churches of Christ, a new believer must be baptized immediately, and some churches keep their baptismal tanks full of water all the time for the occasion. In my Pentecostal childhood, water baptism was practiced and celebrated with new believers about once a month or once a quarter, depending on how many converts a church amassed, but immediately afterwards, the expectation was that these new believers would begin to seek the Baptism in the Holy Spirit (always in respectful capital letters).

Glossolalia, speaking in tongues, as a phenomenon, is not unique to the Assemblies of God, or for that matter to Christianity. My husband's pagan friend, Gus, reports the experience among his fellow worshipers of the Goddess. But among Christians, the Baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues is a Pentecostal distinctive. Before the Charismatic movement in the 1970s, only a few Protestant worshipers practiced it. In my grandmother's day, people who received the gift of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit were ostracized from their mainline denominations and found refuge in the Assemblies of God, United Pentecostal churches, the Church of God, or Four Square churches [find out all the pre-1970s Pentecostal denominations].

If you have not experienced this spiritual phenomenon, think about it this way: You have already taken the life-transforming step of salvation—giving your heart and soul to Christ, beginning the life-long journey of conforming to the image of God that you received at creation. Emotionally and spiritually challenging as that transformation may be, the doctrine of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit now teaches you to wait for more. In order to be open to this experience, you have to lay down control of your most personal functions—your rational mind and the voice that you use to

express it. Practitioners of the gift of speaking in tongues report that the phenomenon occurs when the mind is least full of self and most full of God. But even in that state which is historically the purview of meditative or contemplative traditions, many find difficulty in releasing the physical instrument of the tongue to be "taken over" (possessed?) by the Spirit of another, even if that "Other" is God himself. It's just too personal, intimate, emotional, and deeply antithetical to most Americans' need for control.

Altar calls, centered on practitioners of this gift of the Spirit praying new believers through "to the Holy Ghost," resulted in many humorous and touching stories about the emotional experience. Some tell of the confusing scenario in which the unsuspecting believer, obediently kneeling and intently seeking God, might hear one dear saint on his right urging him to "Hang on! Hang on until the Spirit comes!" while simultaneously, another well-meaning altar worker whispers in his other ear "Let go! Let go, and let the Spirit speak through you!" Which is it? Do I hang on or do I let go? How do I do both?

My own Spirit Baptism experience occurred when I was about nine or ten. I would like to say I had some kind of dramatic revelation or spectacular vision. I had been baptized in water sometime during the year before so the expectations of others were mounting. Today, I can admit that I probably wanted to be baptized in water because my older sister was taking the step, and I hated to be left out! Still, I knew in my heart when the questions were asked about loving Jesus and wanting to follow him my whole life that I could answer honestly in the affirmative. But the Baptism in the Holy Spirit was a different matter. You couldn't schedule it on the calendar or plan for it by answering a series of questions. You could only open yourself to God and hope He was in a generous mood.

One night after a service at First Assembly of God in Wichita, Kansas, where my parents pastored, the altars were opened as they always were on a Sunday night. People streamed forward, praying out loud, some standing, some kneeling, some wandering across the front of the church,

praying aloud for others. I turned around on the front row (where my sister and I always sat so my mom could control us with her eyebrows from the organ directly ahead of us). I knelt on the sculptured green carpet with my elbows propped on the slick ribbed fabric of opera-style seats. If I stayed in one position long enough, the ribs on the red seat would leave furrows on my skin. I rested my forehead on my arms and started praying.

At some point during the prayer I sensed that the words I had in my head were not enough to express what I wanted to say to God. As I searched for the right expressions, I felt my mouth wanting to form words I did not know. Think about the way you feel sometimes when you are frustrated about something and you just can't find the right word to describe your feeling. For some, the sound comes out as a grunt or a groan like Charlie Brown's "Arrrgh!" Or think of a time you have been trying to explain something to someone else but your mind is working faster than the words will come, so you resort to finishing a sentence with "blah, blah, blah" to give the hearer some sense of how many other things there are to say, but you just can't say them fast enough. That's the feeling I had.

Fortunately, I had heard all about the phenomenon of tongues, and I had often heard grown-ups praying a variety of sounds and styles in tongues. I thought that maybe what I was feeling was an opportunity to let the Spirit speak through me, so I relaxed into the feeling and let my spirit and my body collaborate without the intervening censorship of my rational mind. To the uninitiated, what came out probably sounded like baby babbling or a toddler practicing new, but meaningless, sounds. Before long, however, a hand touched my shoulder, and I sensed a grown-up praying over me. I didn't know who it was and I still don't. My dad? My mom? My grandmother? My Sunday School teacher? It didn't really matter because I sensed this conversation was between me and God. I was overwhelmed with the sense of his love for me and His desire to give himself to me. The unlimited resources of the infinite Creator of the Universe were being offered to *me*, a nine-year-old

girl on her knees on the rough green carpet of a little red brick church in Wichita, Kansas. Emotional doesn't even begin to describe it.

I'm sure my parents were pleased when they found out that I had received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. I really don't remember. It wasn't as though there was any particular celebration or reward for what they considered a natural outcome of my relationship with Christ and my obedience to the Spirit of God. It was simply a matter of course in our home.

After that, speaking in tongues while praying at the altar became a common, if not regular, occurrence for me. I rarely questioned what it meant or how it worked. I just did it when I felt moved to: When praying for another person, when interceding for a particular concern, when praising God simply for being God.

The difficulty for many in accepting the experience as divine gift rather than emotional overload is that this experience can be so easily imitated and counterfeited. In a folklore class I took at the University of Missouri, Dr. Elaine Lawless shared with the class research on the Jesus Only Pentecostals of Southern Indiana. She had lived, worked, and attended church among a particular congregation for four years. As she observed the children around the altar during services, she noted that from her outsider's perspective, she could not tell whether the children were experiencing the Spirit or imitating their elders in the behaviors of Pentecostalism.

Lawless's observation reminded of me of the times at the altar in youth camp, when after completing my own prayers on my knees, I would slip into front row seat and quietly sing along with the instruments playing worshipful songs while I watched others in fervent prayer. One year, I remember distinctly, Steve, one of the guys in my youth group, seemed particularly caught up in the Spirit, until I saw his eyes open a tiny slit and scan the crowd to see who was watching. If you've ever seen amateurs talking on television, you've seen this movement of the eyes. They can't help but look from the camera lens to the monitor to see their own face on TV. Likewise, Steve scanned the worshippers through that tiny slit until he caught an eye and then quickly slammed his own

shut in intense concentration, his hands in the air and his lips moving in prayer. In those exuberant prayer sessions, I began to ponder the difference between real experience and counterfeit, noting how easy it was to get caught up in the emotional patterns.

When I was 24 years old, however, I had my most singularly authentic experience to that point with the gift of tongues. I was in graduate school where for the first time I was distanced from the influence of both my church and my family. The second year of my degree program I had started dating a fellow grad student whose religious upbringing and practice was similar enough to my own to be familiar but different enough to be challenging to my assumptions about my faith. Our relationship had encountered some twists and turns, not the least of which occurred when his sciatic nerve kicked up, and he retreated to his apartment to lie in bed in a morphine-induced stupor.

One afternoon, I felt compelled to check on him, so I called him on the phone. As we talked, I sensed increasing depression in his voice, until he finally admitted that he had considered downing the whole bottle of morphine and slipping into the painless, dark, and shallow place it would take him. After I uttered my objection to this line of thinking, we hung up. Instantly, from somewhere deep within me, I began praying for my suicidal friend with a fervor and urgency I had not anticipated and in words I did not know. I recognized in this moment the sensation of the Spirit praying through me, interceding with God on behalf of my hurting friend. I cannot draw a straight line from my prayer to his recovery, but I can say that he recovered and lived a long and productive life with normal ups and downs after that. I can only testify to my personal sense that the Spirit was praying through me for that specific human need.

My personal experiences with the Spirit's move in my life, such as this one, were subtle and less sensational than those of other people, so that I was often somewhat confused by some of the teaching surrounding the Holy Spirit. While I understand all the theological descriptions of the

Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity, a member of the Godhead, with personality and presence, the precise nature of this person was harder to pinpoint from the variety of sermons I heard on the subject. Often the well-structured order of service was set aside because the Spirit had something to tell the church. As a child, I loved those services when the "Spirit moved." It meant no long, dull sermon to sit through! We went straight from the song-singing and prayer time to the altar call without all those other ceremonies.

Some people asserted that the Holy Spirit was a gentleman, too polite to descend upon anyone without an invitation. But the story in Acts 2 describes the Holy Spirit as "tongues of fire" and "a rushing mighty wind," less gentleman and more fire storm. Similarly, the services into which the Spirit fell and moved most mightily, in my experience, were the loudest and most energetic of the year. People would often shout until they were red in the face, crying publicly or running to the altar to kneel prostrate and pray and weep. Sometimes as the Spirit moved, people fell, seemingly unconscious or observably oblivious that they were uttering words in a heavenly language.

Once at church camp, Exie Barber jumped rhythmically for at least a half hour, eyes closed, hands raised, apparently unaware of the rest of the worshipers scattered around him on the platform and the altar. Scholars call this state a trance or ecstasy. Pentecostals call it a blessing. Exie is now approaching retirement from full-time ministry in the same state in which he experienced that gift of the Spirit. I don't know whether this was a one-time visitation of the energetic Spirit of God for him or whether it became a habitual means for him to commune with God. Was God, perhaps, calling him to the pastorate, which he later joined, in that extraordinary occurrence? For me, the authenticity of that experience was the expression of bliss I saw on his face. Though some might have labeled this experience an emotional frenzy with nothing substantially divine behind it, I know he clearly was caught up in his encounter with the Spirit of the Living God. 2289

Don't Check Your Mind at the Door: Emotionalism

3 Inclusion

Many of my non-Pentecostal friends have been a little surprised to learn that I speak in tongues. Maybe my seemingly rational outlook, my level of education, or my apparently "normal" lifestyle work against their image of a Pentecostal/Charismatic believer. Many times I simply assume that I'm not a very good Pentecostal because I don't feel the urge or the need to pray in the Spirit at every opportunity. What I know, though, is that the Holy Spirit, like the wind, "blows where it listeth," as John says in 3:8 of the King James Version. And all the experiences of Spirit-filled worship from the ear-splitting altar services of my childhood to gentle sweep of Spiritual singing that can move across a waiting congregation have tuned my heart and my mind to the moving of the Holy Spirit in everyday life, at work, in conversations, in emotional upheaval, and in the stillness of my personal meditations.

"Didn't you ever feel excluded because you were a woman?" asked my new friend and fellow graduate student at the University of Missouri-Columbia. We were getting to know each other during that idyllic week between orientation and the start of the school year. Richard was from New England—east coast, secular, liberal. He was hearing my story for the first time and marveling in its difference from his own life and experience. His assumption was that such a conservative religious upbringing would be particularly oppressive to women. I decided it was time to reflect on this possibility. "Not really," I finally answered. I never felt that I couldn't do something just because I was female. I was 28-years-old and recently returned from a two-year stint in Europe as a missionary associate. So far, as a woman of faith, I had been able to do almost anything I wanted without shocking anyone.

From its inception, the Pentecostal movement was inclusive, another positive outgrowth of its emotional beginnings. William Seymour, a black preacher, is the prominent figure of the Azusa Street revival in the early 1900s. Although the Assemblies of God and the traditionally African-

American Pentecostal church called The Church of God in Christ formed separately in the first half of the 20th century, the ties between the organizations have been acknowledged and celebrated in various ways throughout the history of the movement.

Women were a high percentage of those who received the baptism in the early day, including XXX whose testimony to XXX is credited with the founding of Central Assembly in Springfield, Missouri, the flagship church of the A/G. Other prominent and influential women included Lillian Trasher, XXX, and XXX. More important than these individual shining lights, however, was the general stance of the organization toward ordaining women, which it has done from the beginning.

The biblical basis for this form of inclusion comes not necessarily from the teachings of Jesus or Paul, but from one of the foundational passages on the work of the Holy Spirit, Joel 2:28-29, which says, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit." This passage implies that the work of the Spirit will cut across gender and class lines, and we had seen such suspension of distinctions in the early history of our movement.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, female equality had dwindled noticeably. I'm not sure if it was caused by a kind of "been there, done that" mentality or whether the rise of feminism in the larger culture resulted in a drastic retreat from the more equitable stance in the subculture. (Or was it closer scrutiny of Paul's many words mistakenly interpreted to subjugate women?) Whatever the cause, the effect was real. It had come home to roost most ironically for me in graduate school. I was casting about for a paper topic in my literary theory class, and my professor kept pushing me toward feminist subjects.

"You don't understand," I complained to him. "I come from a really conservative religious background, and the radical feminist theories we've been reading make me uncomfortable."

"Does your church ordain women?" he asked.

"Well, yes," I replied.

"Then it's not that conservative," he returned.

Seriously? I thought. *If the founders of the Assemblies of God had known that ordaining women would someday put them in the same camp as the feminists, I'm sure they would never have started it!*

Examples of "sexist creep" abound when one looks for them. My mother highlighted one version in the 1990s. In an attempt to fulfill the Great Commission in Matthew XX, the '90s were declared "The Decade of Harvest" for the American Assemblies of God. Early in the outreach effort, mom was scheduled to address a regional meeting of ministers on reaching women in the Assemblies of God. A known and trusted female leader, writer, and speaker, my mom had more than once been the first woman of her generation to sit on boards or work on traditionally male committees. Mom's thoughtful approach to life and unassuming demeanor made her a safe and effective choice. She wasn't interested in promoting herself or "women's issues," but the kingdom of God. Never one to rock the boat, my mom shocked us all by titling her talk, "Women in the Decade of Harvest (or why are there no ladies' restrooms on the executive floor of headquarters?)" While sitting on several boards in the main building of our movement, she discovered that during the breaks, the men's room was near the board room, while the women's room was down the hall and around the corner. Embedded in the 1960s architecture was evidence that the movement at that time had made the assumption that women would never lead.

Since those days, the church has added a task force for women in ministry, they have included at least one woman on the executive presbytery, and many boards and committees now include women. In 2018, the first woman was appointed to the Executive Leadership Team. Individual pastors and leaders have expressed and rejected a variety of positions on the topic, but a deep orientation toward inclusion of "whosoever believeth in Him" remains the basic stance of Pentecostalism as practiced by the Assemblies of God.

This relationally inclusive strain is deeply entrenched in the Pentecostal approach to global missions. From the beginning, indigenous churches have been the goal of our missions organization. Missionaries who landed in countries where Pentecostalism was previously unknown determined from the beginning to set up a church that would eventually not need them. The history of global missions in the Assemblies of God is a fascinating story in itself, but not the focus of this book.

I witnessed inclusiveness of another kind much closer to home in the 1970s. My father was travelling Kansas as a district representative while my mom stayed home to work in the district office, raise my sister and me, and teach Sunday school in the local assembly. Bethel Assembly in Wichita was a congregation of about 250 people who were about to experience the effects of the Jesus movement.

Getting ready for church on Sunday morning was a ritual at our house. My sister and I shared a bathroom and the torments of taming naturally curly hair in a culture obsessed with waist-length straight hair. We had been taught from an early age that we dress up to go to church because we should offer God the best of everything that we have. In reality, dressing up in the 1960s and early 1970s was an unquestioned cultural assumption. We had "school clothes" and "church clothes." We had school shoes and church shoes. We paid more attention to basic grooming to go to church than to school. But more on our dressing habits later. The point is that my mother, in the early 1970s, discussing the growing trend of women wearing pants and girls wearing jeans in public, reassured the ladies in the church that even if women started wearing pants to work, shop, or run errands, they would never wear them to church!

Some months later, the once-estranged son of a dear Bethel church lady showed up at a church service barefoot and dirty with long hair and beard, bell-bottom jeans, a bra-less hippie chick on his arm. Soon a small group of "Jesus freaks" occupied the second row from the front on the piano side of the sanctuary. They were wholly uninitiated in church etiquette. Before service

they talked loudly, sometimes moving from row to row by climbing over the backs of the pews, often sitting cross-legged on the pew, or resting the dirty bottoms of their feet on the pew back ahead of them.

If we had lived in a Hollywood movie, the church-lady tongues would have been hypocritically chattering over the phone lines planning what to do about such outrageous behavior like the "hen-ladies" in *The Music Man*. And maybe the church ladies did cluck and stammer in shock. However, when the socially inappropriate newcomers asked my mom to disciple them through Bible study, she invited them to our home where they sat in a circle on the living room floor, Bibles in their laps like Paul and his fellow students at the feet of Gamaliel.

The accumulated smell of sweat and tobacco, and what was probably pot, intensified as they gathered in our house. But my mom didn't fear their influence on her respectable children. Instead, she influenced them by teaching them, praying with them, and gently nurturing their inner landscape without comment on their outer appearance. Eventually, the hippie-chick married one of the sons of a prominent family in the church. The ring-leader married one of the girls in the youth group. Most of that crowd are still serving in places of ministry and worship, the Kingdom of God was enlarged, and God was glorified. And I'm pretty sure they are all wearing shoes by now.

Their acceptance into the Body of Christ at the beginning of that tumultuous time brought the possibility of revival and growth into a potentially stodgy cluster of old-timey, Pentecostal believers. Today that church is one of the largest in the Kansas District, and I hope it is still including seekers of all kinds. 1741

Don't Check Your Mind at the Door: Emotionalism

4 Discernment

At the height of the Charismatic movement, people were seeking God's will on a variety of issues—great and small. Some went to the story of Gideon in Judges 6 for a process to apply to themselves, something called "putting out a fleece." Gideon asked God for a sign that He would save Israel against their enemies by the army that Gideon would lead. He told God he would put out a lamb's wool coat (the fleece) on the ground and that, in the morning, he would expect the fleece to be covered with dew and the ground to be dry. When this miracle occurred, he politely asked God for one more sign, and outlined the opposite result. The next morning, the fleece was dry and the ground was covered with dew. Yes, it was pretty much incontrovertible evidence that God would fight on their side. For a time, putting out a figurative fleece was a popular device for discerning God's will.

Another related claim to increased discernment of God's will by the Spirit was sometimes called having "a word from the Lord." The practice of this gift can be outrageously self-serving, and the potential for its abuse is enormous. One form of it became a running joke in our family. My sister, Darla, was a beautiful and mysterious young woman. Dark hair, dark eyes, and elegant bearing made her an attractive target. The fact that her father was a leader in the church hierarchy increased her value in the marriage market for any aspiring young minister. At some point, the family lost count of how many young men had whispered to her confidentially that God had revealed to him that she should marry him. Her standard response? "When He reveals it to me, too, I'll let you know."

The most destructive example of self-serving abuse that I have encountered, however, is the story of a college student named Abby. Abby's family had entered the Assemblies of God through the Charismatic movement of the 1970s. As if Pentecostalism were not experiential enough, the Charismatic movement tapped into even more extreme practices with less teaching on the gifts of

the Spirit. Abby began college at an unaccredited Christian school in North Carolina and soon transferred to an Assemblies of God college. Not long after she arrived, she was targeted by another female student who claimed to be hearing from the Lord concerning Abby's potential as a spiritual leader. Being pure of heart, being desirous to serve God in any way He wanted her to, and being used to having people "prophesy" over others, Abby put herself under the control of this fellow student.

They began to meet regularly in a dorm room, where the student would light candles and chant prayers over Abby, feeding her with attractive but distorted messages about her status and future at college and beyond. Artistic and deeply talented, Abby naively believed the predictions of the fellow believer, privileging another's experience with God over her own. The results were disastrous. Abby broke up with her long-time boyfriend, pursued high-profile positions on campus, and vainly harbored expectations of prominence in ministry and social standing based on this woman's encouragements. When one of the central strands of this intricately woven web of predictions did not come to pass, Abby's faith was shaken and her emotional attachment to the rest of this woman's gossamer half-truths was stretched to the breaking point. Her health disintegrated, she dropped out of school, and she suffered extreme embarrassment among her peers.

Fortunately, the ties that bound Abby to a God who loves her and saves her were not shredded beyond repair. She has since finished three degrees, married, and established a meaningful Christian life free from the self-serving abuses she experienced at the whims of others early in her adulthood.

A powerful, meaningful example of the gift of discernment occurred in my father's ministry. While praying for others during an altar service at Woodston Family Camp—a small open-air camp in Western Kansas, he felt the pull of the Spirit to move aside and pray alone. At that time, he told me later, the Lord spoke to him, deep in his heart, and prepared him for a change in ministry that

was coming to him in the near future. The leader of the district was retiring, and the Spirit confirmed to my father the outcome of the next election. Tempered with appropriate obedience and humility, my father did not share what he believed the Spirit had revealed to him to any but my mother. He even equivocated to me when I asked him a couple of nights before the election what he thought the outcome would be. He suggested several possible directions the election could take and told me that whatever the outcome, we would trust God. Much later in my life, he shared this experience with me as an example of God's loving care and expressed gratitude that he had had the word from the Lord during the years after the election when some relationships were strained by the outcome.

Although the emotionalism of the Pentecostal movement leaves it open to abuse or imitation rather than authentic experience, for those who strive to live a Spirit-led life with insight and purity of heart, it has the potential to develop deeply relational and spiritually sensitive capacities among the believing body of Christ. Salvation still calls people to relationship with Christ and each other. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit still empowers people to intercede for and include others in ways that stretch our limited human capacity. The global reach of Pentecostalism today, from Korea to Brazil as well as across Africa and along the Silk Road, attests to the energy and emotional power the Spirit provides to help people believe, worship, and live in community. 971

Sections to Lose:

The emotional nature of Pentecostalism fostered some positive traits among its adherents, one of which was their extreme loyalty not only to their relationship with Jesus, but also to their relationships with other believers—especially those within their own movement. The bonds were particularly strong among pastors, evangelists, and missionaries. Biennially, the Assemblies of God holds its General Council at which the business of the organization is conducted by executive leaders, general presbyters, ordained ministers, and lay delegates. These meetings occur conveniently during the first week in August—just after the summer camp season has ended and before the September school cycle begins. They are usually in a metropolitan area to accommodate the large number of attendees. But General Council was really a family event. People we knew organized their family vacations around it. My sister and I had developed a network of friends from around the country that we saw only every other year at Council.

This subculture, a tightknit network of ministerial families, was unsurprisingly homogenous in its early days and through the middle of the twentieth century. However, with the advent of the Charismatic movement and the fragmentation of secular society, we began to see similar fault lines run through our organization as well. When opportunities to break away from the main body of believers presented themselves to my dad, however, his response was usually a joke. "I have the A/G Shield (the logo of the Assemblies of God) tattooed on my arm," he would say. The irony of course, is that tattoos were anathema in our little subculture, but it was his way of saying that he was permanently loyal to the original organization.

I watched that loyalty tested once when in mid-career he was up for election to regional leadership position. In organizational terms, this post was prestigious and potentially powerful. The previous presbyter had effectively retired from all leadership responsibilities but hung on to this one key position at the regional level. As the vote between this aging leader and my dad remained deadlocked, dad rose in the meeting to take his name out of the running. On the next ballot,

the older man was re-elected. I wasn't in the meeting, but Dad told me about the vote in the hotel room afterward. Incensed for him, I ranted about how wrong it was for the older man to obstruct his rise to power.

"Why couldn't he see it was your turn? Why didn't you get someone to talk to him?" I demanded.

My Dad's response was, "Jesus knows. Who else should I complain to? It's more important to me to serve Jesus than to split the loyalty of the voters by remaining in the race." End of discussion. We serve Jesus, not our own self-interests—even when it means being passed over for positions of leadership and power that you are clearly qualified for. The unity of the church matters more.

The social network of the Assemblies of God has deep roots and a long history. My mom is a walking genealogy of the intermarriages of those in A/G families. For our own amusement once, we traced the lineage of a friend of mine who grew up in Haiti as a missionary kid to a connection to Brad Pitt through a series of obscure marriage alliances among Pentecostals. I think it was something like 7 degrees of separation, but the links were there. It included multiple missionary families, some Kansas wheat farmers, real estate developers, and a General Superintendent.

I think it would be interesting someday to post a huge piece of butcher paper at a General Council. On it we would write the names of a handful of key early leaders in the A/G: Harold and Marge Jones or G. Raymond Carlson. Or we could start with the prolific Hanson family from Wisconsin from which all 12 children found their way into the ministry in one form or another. We would let everyone draw their own connections to these families to reveal a large web of intermarriage and dynastic progress. Fortunately, the fellowship is large enough that we haven't overly diluted the gene pool. I hope.

Perhaps this network of relationships is most obvious to me because I live in the headquarters city, Springfield, Missouri. One of the best things about living here is watching the deep friendships and historical ties of my parents' generation as they move toward retirement and life's end.

In the 1970s, the Assemblies of God realized the increasing number of aging ministers who had expended their lives spreading the gospel but had not developed a deep financial portfolio toward retirement. Maranatha Village was developed. Imagine the cognitive dissonance of those who fervently believed and preached that Jesus's return is immanent now facing their own life's end without seeing the promise fulfilled. More than one couple I know has faced an extended illness and death of a partner without having made the basic arrangement for a cemetery plot—their faith in Divine Healing or the Second Coming so strong that such a plan seemed irrelevant.

Soon after my parents retired from Kansas to Springfield, my dad began having breakfast on Friday mornings with Ted. He and my dad had been friends at Central Bible Institute during their Bible training years. Later they had both served in leadership positions in Kansas before Ted and his wife Iris moved East to finish their pastoral career. Many mornings at Wheat State Camp, I awoke to the sound of Ted's resonate voice over the intercom announcing morning reveille. His wife was the daily cabin inspector, composing humorous poems to describe the oddities she found on her rounds, and handing out the daily "clean cabin award" to be hung on the winning door for the day.

Years later, both couples were back in Springfield, where they had first met, now with time on their hands and memories in their heads. Contrary to doctor's orders, Ted had determined to have bacon and eggs at least once a week, so my dad joined him in his defiance against death. After a while, they realized that other couples they had known from their Kansas days were retiring to Springfield. Today, the Kansas Breakfast Group as they are known, has regular attendance of about 30 to 40 people. The ties that bound them in their youth have extended to their old age. Their personal relationship with Jesus, their commitment to their church organization, and the emotional bonds that have supported them through both also connect them deeply to one another for life.

One of the things that strikes me most about these connections and loyalties is how they demonstrate the way grace works in salvation. In my twenties, I signed up as a missionary associate to work in Brussels, Belgium, for a distance learning program sponsored by the A/G. In order to go, I had to raise money from family, friends, and churches. My father, ever the purist, didn't want to use his status as a District Superintendent to pressure churches to give to me. Instead, I had to contact churches directly and was allowed to contact only those pastors with whom I had a personal relationship beyond my parents' connection. This restriction made fund raising more of a challenge than I had anticipated. Most people agreed to send $10 or $20 a month for the two years I would be there, a far cry from the amount I needed to be cleared to go.

At one point in the process, however, I received a check from a woman whom I had never met. She did not attend an Assemblies of God church. She was a friend of my aunt in a small Kansas town, and she had known my dad's family for years. The check covered a full month of my budget accompanied by a kind note from the donor. When I opened the envelope to discover this generosity, the comparison struck me. I'm receiving this gift not because of my own merit, but by virtue of my father and my aunt. I did not know my aunt had shared the story of my trip with this woman, but here she was, giving to me out of her abundance because others had vouched for my worth.

In the same way, God bestows his unmerited favor on us because he knows the worthiness of Christ who vouches for us. Since then, I live in awareness that almost nothing I have or have done is my own. Everything I have, I have been given—from God, through my family and the people of God, to me. And I strive to pass it on to my friends, students, and associates. In spite of my unemotional entrance into this family of God, I find myself increasingly attached to the idea of the bonds of community experienced by its members. For many Pentecostals, the emotionalism that may have characterized their early experiences in the tradition has solidified into real, meaningful bonds of Christian fellowship—the body of Christ. 1500