

# Faith Is The Strength To Serve

Charles G. Turkington

## A PROLOGUE

Occasionally we are asked to attempt some endeavor that is too much for us. We know how impossible is the undertaking when we give our agreement. Yet the honor that accompanies the invitation tantalizes us to try. This is my emotion as I turn to the task of relating the true romance of faith that is the story of my father, William David Turkington.

Knowing, nevertheless, that the value of any life can hardly be discerned in isolated deeds of daring or in intermittent observation of the character cloaked for public appearance, and having seen this man in an intimate way that even his closest academic colleagues have not, I, who alone am honored to be called his son, shall set myself to this high task.

## HOLY HERITAGE HEWN OUT OF HARDSHIPS

Only four years had expired since the northwesterly state of Washington was admitted to the Union, when the birth of a first son brought deep gratitude to the small farm home of William Turkington. He had come to this vast country from Ireland to launch a new life on the eighty-acre land-grant tract that nestled peacefully to the west of the majestic Cascades, within full view of snow-capped Mt. Baker. Soon after his arrival he had met, wooed, and won, Augusta Carlson who had come to America from Sweden. On April 25, 1893, William David Turkington was born. There is something symbolic in the birth of this man whose life was later to have such a telling effect upon scores of men and women serving in scattered fields of the Christian world service. Born of a Swedish mother and an Irish father, the one other person who assisted at his birth was a German neighbor lady, an obstetrician.

Denied many of the tawdry luxuries of our day, this boy was granted priceless gifts that are not to be found in the average heritage. On the homestead, he and his brother and two sisters

learned the meaning of the faithful discharge of responsibility, a lesson that has been reflected in his nearly forty years of steadfast service at the Asbury institutions. Here, in the lives of his mother and father, he saw Christianity at its best. Here was no dead dogma of a static or loveless orthodoxy. Here he saw the gospel incarnate. Such a gospel cannot but leave its impact upon the lives that it touches. Augusta Carlson Turkington was a deeply religious person whose teaching and Christ-like example and whose humble and patient life had a telling effect upon the life of her oldest son. It was at her knee that he first learned of the faith; it was here at the time of family devotions, that he gave his life to his mother's Lord; it was here again that the voice of God laid claim upon his young life for the Christian ministry.

The unpretentious frame building that housed the Methodist church in the nearby hamlet of Acme, Washington, was the center of the family's religious activity. A similarly unassuming one-room school was the locale of the first eight years of a life-time involvement in education. With an insatiable desire to learn, our young scholar, upon the completion of elementary grades, continued his studies at Whatcom County High School in Bellingham, Washington. Thus, William David Turkington was first weaned from the simple, healthy life on the homestead. But only for a time; for the year 1912 brought a diploma, and a milestone had been reached in the yet-to-be-fulfilled dream of Christian service.

The ways of God are difficult to discern when tragedy strikes, but wise is the man who knows how to let the bitter circumstances of life color his character with beautiful hues and strengthen the fibre of his faith. Tragedy burst in on the sudden wings of death when an infuriated bull took the life of the father of the family. The years 1914, 1915, and 1916 were spent in filling the vacated place of the farmer father. Life was teaching its precious lesson of responsibility. I have often wondered at the physical stamina of my father. These years spent in hard, honest labor on the farm, and part-time with the Washington State Fish Commission, in logging camps, and in saw mills--all helped build a physique that has withstood the rigors of a long, demanding life of service.

Another phase of life was entered when the dark cloud of World War I brought the call to service in defense of country. William David Turkington was drafted into the Army in 1917

and spent the duration of the grave national crisis in olive drab uniform. February 1919 brought the separation of First Sergeant Turkington from military service. As he returned to civilian life, the call of Christ to the ministry continued to resound in his soul. A minister was needed for the Eureka Methodist Church in Bellingham, and for the next few months this man, whose experiences had brought maturity sooner than it comes to most, had his first opportunity to preach the Gospel.

Life is one long journey, but every bend in the road is not of equal import. A decisive juncture caused William David to turn his face toward the Blue Grass country of Kentucky and the small village of Wilmore. Asbury College was to be the first leg in this qualifying lap. When he left the West in September 1919, however, he could not possibly have known that he was saying goodby to all that he had come to love as home. At his first sight of the trifle of a town in Jessamine County, he had not the vaguest notion that this would be the place of his fortunes in the following of his faith.

The four years which followed were filled with a variety of activities, both academic and extracurricular. A seminary-dean-in-the-making occupied his Asbury College days with hard work, as his academic standing reveals. As salutatorian of the senior class, William David Turkington stood close to the top in the ranks of the serious students, a place he had held the previous three years. Well-balanced college days brought to him the editor's chair of the *New Era*, the campus newspaper. Ability with the trumpet gave him a place in the band and orchestra. The championship basketball team of his class used his athletic acumen on the hardwood. The 1923 edition of the yearbook, *The Asburian*, carried this fitting and definitive quotation beneath his picture:

Turk has been an outstanding character in Asbury; a man of no small ability, he has stood at the head of his classes, has been a leader in the student organizations, and admired by all.

"No man in whom I have believed has ever preached me a poor sermon. No man in whom I have not believed has ever preached me a good sermon." These were the words of a seminary president to his student charges. They suggest the indelible impression made by one life upon another. The character of great and good men like Dr. Henry Clay Morrison, Dr. George W. Ridout, Dr. W. E. Harrison, and Dr. W. Brant

Hughes, made their ineradicable mark on this student from the Northwest. He saw in them a quality of life, honesty of intellect, and a dedication and devotion to the truth of Christ, that became a built-in part of his life. Under their leadership, the knowledge of the Spirit-filled life was made a reality in the experience of William David Turkington. Large credit is due the late Dr. Henry Clay Morrison, who, through his assistance in counseling, his interest in prayer, helped to guide this life in the direction of graduate school and the teaching ministry.

But Asbury and Wilmore had yet another contribution to make to Dean Turkington. While playing first trumpet in the orchestra, his attention had been turned from the conductor and the music at hand to the young lady at the piano. Emily Willard Garvey, daughter of a prominent Wilmore family, had received her training at the Asbury Academy and the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. Teaching for a short time at Blackstone College for girls in Virginia, and at Trevecca College, she had returned to her home town and was an instructor in piano on the Asbury faculty. The first and cursory interest across the trumpet and piano tops was followed by concentration in courtship; and the day after commencement, May 30, 1923, the local Methodist church became the setting for the solemnizing of the marriage. Thus, the two tributaries flowed into a beautiful stream. There has not been one step taken in the fulfillment of his calling that William David Turkington did not have the loyal heart, the helping hands, and the fervent prayers of his partner. Out of their home have gone three children who are convinced that Christianity is credible. They became persuaded of its value by the beauty and constancy of two lovely lives--to the extent that all three are living in parsonage homes of their own. When the questionable antics and insufferable thinking of some obscured the way for sound faith, these two bright lights of love and truth produced the evidence that has held three children steady in their Christian pursuit. These exemplars of Christ exerted the subtle pressure of an unaffected goodness.

The years of preparation that followed added much in every way to the character of the earnest theological student. Pursuing the degrees of Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Arts at Princeton Seminary brought two new dimensions to his life. Evangelical scholarship had reached an apex of quality during these years in Princeton; and the lives of great scholars such as Robert Dick Wilson in the field of Old Testament and

J. Gresham Machen in New Testament studies, left Dr. Turkington with an unfading love for truth and a lofty respect for the historical Christian faith.

The practical understanding that is needed by professors in our theological schools was added during these days. The Turkingtons had opportunity to serve the Chamber's Street Methodist Church in Trenton and the Lakehurst Methodist Church at Lakehurst while engaged in the studies of these years of seminary in the Garden State. March 4, 1924, brought the diapered debut of a daughter, Wilmetta (Mrs. Paul F. Abel, parsonage wife and mother--the Methodist church in Flushing, N. Y.). The experiences of four years in New Jersey, where Dean Turkington joined the New Jersey Conference of The Methodist Church of which he is yet a member, had put a fine edge on a life which was to become such a faithful and effective tool in the Lord's workshop for the fashioning of many men of faith. A new juncture had been reached in the way. The workman would pursue further studies at the University of Kentucky, but the hour for action had arrived; and the thrill of fulfillment that comes to all those who reach the milestone that separates preparation from performance brought joy to the hearts of husband and wife.

#### AN OPEN DOOR TO LIFE-SERVICE

How wise are those who understand that the Lord most often leads into the field of service where one has preparation to produce effectively. Too many misfits have barged into a niche where they have brought misery to themselves and countless others. William David Turkington evidenced the gift of sound judgment and of discernment when, in the days following graduation from Princeton Seminary, he declined an invitation from Dr. Lewis R. Akers, president of Asbury College, to assume a professorship in history at the College. Instead, he continued in the pastorate at Lakehurst. For him, the fullness of time had not yet come in finding his suitable place of service in the vineyard of the Lord.

A few more months were spent in service to the church until the time grew ripe. The call of God was written in the form of a summons from the dean of Asbury Theological Seminary to take a professorship in that institution. In the fall of 1927, the

family of three made plans to transport themselves and all their earthly goods to Wilmore, Kentucky. The new professor was to fill the chair which in a few years was to become the professorship of New Testament Language and Literature. Thus began a relationship that has been unbroken until the present, save for a three year period, 1940-1943. At that time, Dr. Henry Clay Morrison, president of Asbury Theological Seminary, in conference with Dr. Z. T. Johnson, president of Asbury College, released Dean Turkington that he might become head of the Philosophy and Religion Department at the College.

An unknown poet has put into words the sentiments of a son as he retrospects upon the nearly forty years of service that his father has given in unwavering fidelity to a cause which he has come to love more than life.

Faith is not merely praying  
Upon our knees at night;  
Faith is not merely straying  
Through darkness into light;  
Faith is not merely waiting  
For glory that may be.  
Faith is the brave endeavor,  
The splendid enterprise,  
The strength to serve, whatever  
Conditions may arise.

Certainly faith was expressed praying upon his knees. I can yet see two persons kneeling as I passed their door on the way to rest. The urgent petitions that fell from father's lips at the time of family devotions--devotions which were faithfully observed each morning--are yet echoing down the corridors of memory. He believed and he prayed that the great God of his life could and would bring the institution that he loved through many difficult days to its rightful place of service in Christ's kingdom.

Faith was seen so clearly in the hope of "the glory that might be." God was leading and would bring the Seminary through the shallow and turbulent waters to the deep oceans of maturity. But these words are ready-made for this man whose life has been marked by an equanimity of spirit that has been a steadying factor in the life of a Seminary and a family: "Faith is the brave endeavor, the splendid enterprise, the strength to serve, whatever conditions may arise."

Early years at Asbury brought two new members to the Turkington household. Betty Jane (Mrs. Vern Jenson, wife of the minister of education and visitation at the Morrow Memorial Methodist Church in Maplewood, N. J.) made her appearance on December 7, 1927. On March 5, 1929, variety was added to the brood with the coming of Charles Garvey, now minister at the Versailles Methodist Church, Versailles, Kentucky.

The depression years of the thirties occasioned some months when salaries were not available for the teachers of Asbury institutions; but dedication to the calling of molding the minds of the young with the truth of the Master Teacher made these difficult days a part of the "all things" in God's plan for my father. How did a seminary professor, on the inadequate salaries paid by the Asbury schools in those years, educate three children, making possible a college degree for each, and assisting one in three more years of seminary studies? What was once the cause for the immodest murmuring of the offended social-status sensitivity of a teen-age son is now, in retrospect, a source of pride. During these years the Turkington garage stood empty. Oh, how insufferable a social sin! Not so! Rather, how sane a sacrifice for two mature members of the family who had their eyes fixed on the stars.

The commencement exercises of 1936 brought the honor of a Doctor of Divinity degree from Asbury College. Graduates at the commencement of 1949 testified to the contribution made by Dean Turkington to the Asbury institutions by bestowing upon him the "A" award (Distinguished Alumnus Award). The affectionate name "marrying parson" was added to other titles as the years brought many students to the office for pre-marital counseling and a request for an officiating minister for the ceremony.

A full report on this life demands some mention of its impact upon the community and church through participation, for nearly forty years, in the varied activities. Here, too, there has been a full-orbed expression of Christian discipleship. Membership on the town council extended across the span of twenty-three years, seven of which were employed in the office of mayor. Every Sunday since 1928, with the exception of a few months of service as pastor of the Nonesuch Presbyterian Church in Woodford County, Kentucky, has found William David Turkington teaching an adult class at the local Methodist church. This task

has not been taken lightly. Hours of preparation have preceded the presentation of the lesson from Scripture.

Interest extended to the work of the Wilmore Camp Meeting, which he served as secretary for twenty years and as president for two years. Civic groups have found in him a willing worker, for he has believed that the Christian faith cannot be pushed into the confines of an ecclesiastical box, with life thereby being torn into fragments, and with religion thus losing the power to speak to men who must walk common paths.

What has William David Turkington meant to the life of a struggling theological seminary which has come to its present position of leadership through many dark and crucial years? The whole story can not be told within the confines of this brief paper. If it could, it would come, not as a tale of isolated incidents of momentary glory, but rather as a long, unbroken account of a life given up to the glory of one ultimate cause. It would be a story which begins at the birth of the institution and continues in the teaching contribution until 1946, when at the retirement of Dr. Fred Halsey Larabee, the tasks of a dean were added to his teaching responsibilities. Few, I believe, have known how broad were the shoulders of my father, who, during the years that President J. C. McPheeters lived in California, carried many of the administrative responsibilities that were truly second-mile services.

It would not be speaking amiss to say that no other man has given as much of his life to Asbury Theological Seminary as has William David Turkington. Simple calculation of the years, to say nothing of the hours of service crowded into the days of these years, will bear out this contention. This man worked, prayed, and patiently waited as more than one crisis threatened to sound the death knell of the school he loved. The post of service always found this sentinel on guard. He did not permit himself the liberty of a sabbatical leave or the pleasure of a trip abroad. He has been that person who was willing to forego these privileges, granted to his colleagues.

#### TRIBUTE TO A LIFE OF FAITH

Statistics cannot tell the whole truth about the life of any man, and particularly about the influence of Dean Turkington. The witness of countless numbers of men fall on my ears with deep

satisfaction. Testimonies come from all corners of the world to which Asbury has sent its ambassadors of God's grace: "Your dad meant more to me than any influence of my seminary days." "I will never forget the new insights that came in your father's New Testament course." "In Dean Turkington's life I have seen a practical verification of holiness." "A Christian and a gentleman."

The *Seminarian* (yearbook of 1950) expresses with terseness what could be said with elaboration: "As a respected teacher and capable administrator, our Dean has represented to us a high ideal of Christian learning. His classes in New Testament have added inspiration to facts. His assured poise has lent dignity to chapel services. His calm Christian spirit has won our confidence. Dean of Asbury Theological Seminary, Dr. W. D. Turkington symbolizes to us a thoughtful devotion to Christ. Enriched by his life, we hope to carry that spirit into our ministry."

These, and all others who give their words of praise for this life, little realize how correct is their appraisal. Those of us who have lived in his household can verify every good word said about this man whom we call father. He is our pattern of a saint without wings, whose practical Christianity has been an encouragement to us. We know that he has been everything that he has appeared to be: dedicated dean, thoughtful teacher, concerned citizen, faithful father, helpful husband, sensible saint, sincere and faithful servant of his Master in the discharge of his calling to be God's man through the years at Asbury Theological Seminary.