BRIDGE THE GAP MINISTRIES

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47 YEAR OLD TEST – NOW "IN SERVICE"

PALM BEACH ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY



Returning to the roots of **BGTM**, Nancy and I revisited **"our beginning" at Palm Beach Atlantic University.** The Biblical writers also had their beginnings loaded with tested hardships even to the point of death. To a very small degree, we too began our **47 year test** the moment after my graduation.

King Solomon preceding his Dad, King David's, wealthy to begin his own research journey to the **meaning to "LIFE".** He concluded "there was no meaning to life at all!" But in frustration he brought it to an end with a beautiful analogy "time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens." **Ecclesiastes 3:2-8**

2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing,
6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Solomon's poetry of hot and cold seasons, night and day, sunny and stormy days he saw all have their position, place, and purpose.

ALL GLORY BE TO GOD WHAT HE CAN DO

In our 23rd year of Bridge The Gap Ministries, and in light of our travel journey back to West Palm Beach, **it's heavy on my heart to share our personal story how God orchestrated our storms of rejection into an arena of ministry perhaps unknown nationwide.**

My 1951 beginnings in Louisville, KY seminary days our beloved Rev. Edmon and Catherine Burgher, stepped out in faith with their children Ben, David, Tim, Don, and Nancy, for a call to **"Russian people"**. With his motto: "***Love your enemies.***" Dad was visionary his whole life. Their commitment and faith supported us literally to Russia (Iron Curtain up) "as a tourist only" to share the Gospel. Later Dad's call from NAMB was to Los Angeles, CA in the 60'S as a missionary to Russian churches. There he learned the Russian language. We did a little by singing. In 1965 Dad got another call to pastor a small Czechoslovakian church in Masaryktown, FL. Yes, one test after test all our childhood years. God was so faithful in it all. **Our family is so indebted to Dad and Mom for their relentless courage, and faith they passed on to us!** Looking back, it is amazing how God launched all 5 Burgher siblings in extremely different ways matching our talents and spiritual gifts!

The 70's rioting across American colleges was HOT. Dr. Jess Moody, Pastor of FBC West Palm Beach, in deep concern set out to **change that picture birthing a college at his church.** His book **"Wonders & Miracles"** exposed the "extreme" financial difficulties that survived!

Don Harper was his recruiter in Jacksonville, FL for the new college in West Palm Beach. Upon my H.S. graduation I heard about a career conference in Jacksonville. In God's plan I visited Don's recruiting table for Palm Beach Atlantic College". **I was ready to go!**

On the other fence, Nancy Stephens, a "native Georgia peach" girl, experienced her most devastating loss and closest friendships, Claire, at 14 years old. Her parents, Buck & Grace Weaver, in much remorse, transferred his job to FL. Nancy's deep respect took her to visit them for comfort and assurance for their future. **But God stepped in at such a remorse.** While there she met students who were talking about a brand new Christian college in WPB, FL.! She was so impressed by one of their friends, Neil Helton, that she decided to transfer her credits to that college in FL.

For me personally at PBAU was a massive "turning point" in my life understanding the need to know God's will first through the filling of the Holy Spirit with a PBAU roommate conversation.

By God's divine appointment, Nancy and **I just happened to be "in line" for registration in the fall of 1971**. Her "outgoing personality" attracted numerus fellow students for dates (24 men exact). My "quiet personality" wasn't upbeat for that. However, by the time of my 4th year for graduation voted Mr. PBAC in 1973, most everyone "just knew" we were going to marry! It apparently was obvious to all. Upon her official **"yes",** on the intercoastal sea wall the **evening sun** was positioned directly over the **cross of FBC WPB**!!

After 53 years, 4 weeks ago Nancy and I drove up to the very place where I proposed to her. Interestingly, the apartment guard there told me we were on **"private property".** Driving off I agree with him, **"Yes, he is right, that place was "private property" between Nancy and I when I said ,"*Well, will you marry me?*" that day in 1973.** 2 months later: "I do, and I do." at Briar Lake Baptist Church Atlanta, GA.

With my bride our **"unknown journey"** began seeking jobs in my elementary education degree. Though I loved teaching "no experience was closed doors or teaching the wrong age group". I resorted to odd jobs. That was the queue to return back to GA.

Back to GA again closed doors for teaching resulted back to odd jobs. But GA Baptist Children's Home opened to us as "house parents". It was the birthplace for our first adorable son, **"Matthew"** 1976 (Gift of God), while parenting 12 other children whose parents deserted them or orphans. For a young couple it was massive, and striatus yet learning the real world of parenting awaiting us.

But the tables turned when our local pastor, Tom Daugherty Newton, GA "suggested" **I needed more training with my teaching gift** in New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary where he attended! Once visited we packed our bags and head for NOBTS, New Orleans. Our whole new world of 2 year degree in Religious Education. Funding was via Roadway Freight loading/unloading all night shifts. In the midst of studies and work, God gifted us again with our beautiful **"Jenny"** 1978 (God is Gracious). Upon my 1979 graduation and ordination began the search for religious education/outreach minister. To my surprise finding a church that prioritized on evangelism became an **"unpopular challenge"** along with being our first church as the "new kid on the block".

Then came our highest level test. Literally three churches within three years in a row came to me with, ***"We really don't need you here anymore."*** "The test against my best" was completely rejected. The third church pastor was "for me" and very hurt by the opinions against us, and nothing he could do. Three test strikes and we were **OUT FOR GOOD**! Our only choice was to return to Nancy's home in GA.

From Nancy's perspective, to say the least, rejecting her husband was horrendous. Yet "it was a relief" knowing we were ready to go back her home in GA. It was a total loss of our mobile home.

Bright side: Nancy has always had a "live-on-stage" personality. On stage at PBAU was here highlight. God knew her heart, and arranged for us to **"meet Actor "Donna Douglas" in person in our trailer home."** Her Dad, Emett Smith, was a member at our church. My goodness, a beautiful lady both inside and out was a spot light for us both.

Returning back to Atlanta was again in search for a church outreach position or public school teacher for months, but a **dead end**. But we stayed involved with a local church. We kept our beautiful children supportive in all activities with the best spirit possible in spite of our earthquake circumstances. We made moves from motels to apartments to finally our purchased first home for stability. Lord, lead the way!

It was apparent seeking a church or elementary school position still a dead end. The God gifted us with "**Daniel**" 1987 (God is my Judge). For stability He supplied me with accounts payable opening for inventory at Southwest Stainless Co. in Lithonia 1985-2003, along with Nancy working as secretary with the GA Baptist Foundation.

However **evangelism never left my heart!** God gave me a very simple remedy! Lunch hour to hit the local streets house to house with the Gospel. It was the highlight of my day with amazing results. Only eternity will measure the impact all around Lithonia, GA. I kept thinking, and praying ***"If only I could do this fulltime!"***

Well, **God in His mercy** did open a door to the Gwinnett Diversion Center and Detention Center in Lawrenceville to have Bible Studies every other week. It was an amazing highlight Sunday afternoons. Nothing can top seeing what God was doing in incarcerated men's lives. Keeping up with the multitude of salvations and literature follow up and the several trips to Angola State Prison in LA. all God ordained.

Once a year was a cover dish dinner for all men provide by FBC Lilburn church. **To this day I am still in touch with many of those men from the Detention/Diversion Center making an impact in our churches and their communities.** One inmate: *(Thank you, Derek Manis, for literally giving BTGM a Konica Minolta copy machine for all these years.)* Our Gospel literature is literally all over Gwinnett Co. and other states. Untold # of Bible corresponds courses were mailed to inmates there during those years.

But our elected leadership voting changed from Butch Conway and Kebo Taylor as the new Sheriff. God has reasons but he closed doors to the Detention Center and Diversion Center.

The "test of closed doors" didn't stop God's plan for me. It was the beginning to an avenue I never dreamed possible. **FULL TIME MINISTRY**. In my heart I longed for being in full time ministry from the beginning in seminary from 1979. That day was approaching.

I could not explain the longing in my heart, but I just **felt lead to quit my fulltime job at Southwest Stainless.** God worked through a longtime friend, Tom Abernathy, telling me, ***"If I needed any help just let me know."*** That set off hope, but I just needed to be 100% sure!

I took a day off to climb Stone Mountain to **listen, listen, and listen.** No writing on the wall, no voice in the air, no voice in the sky. Only my entire view of all downtown Atlanta looked like "bunched up toothpicks". It changed my perception to microscopic compared to God's majestic earth much less those "small toothpick skyscrapers in downtown Atlanta". Every time now when I climb Stone Mountain, I still go to that **"exact place"** I sat to just listen.

2003 - time to leave my job! With Tom's assistance for our non-profit 501c3 status, and David Huff's clerical IRS assistance, Nancy and I made a public announcement to our congregation for their prayer support. With an official banquet presentation we were off to "full time". To this day there are so many families have stayed faithful supporting us and the growing vision ahead.

However, radical changes took place immediately in my new schedule. The new Sheriff, Kebo Taylor, **closed the doors of the Detention and Diversion Center** to all the church volunteers in the dormitories. No word can express the awesome arena there to share the Gospel of Christ. So many assisted to those just out, but no place to go, rejected by their family or no job placement.

SO WHERE DO I GO NEXT? Well, that was obvious! Where do all the criminal sentencings begin? **The Courthouse: what a revelation!** But it was foreign territory to me! I gathered a few folks for a Jericho prayer walk around the building several times. Finally for my first time I walked through their security gates and totally stunned at its magnitude in organization in distribution of responsibilities for Gwinnett Co. The **left side -** court halls for people waiting for court appeal. The **right side -** for elected official's offices and administration.

God's quiet voice hit my heart, *"Son, your 47 years of testing is complete to officially "serve here" in this courthouse as a "court hall chaplain" unknown anywhere in America. My judges and priests with Moses were the first Tabenacle (courthouse) in the desert. But over these centuries the priest existed out without my permission. My 'mercy' priesthood must be reinstated back into our court systems nationwide. This is your mission field designed before the foundations of the world symbolizing 'my earth is my court hall' preparing 8 billion people for their court date at 'death's door' room. Only those who have accepted my Attorney Jesus to plead and pay for their charges will have access to my home in heaven. Yes, their good works are unacceptable, and will not get them off death row or to heaven."*

My God, He is an awesome God of a second chance mercy! All I knew next was to just to go inside and say **"HELLO"** to those waiting in the court hall and ask, ***"I'm a chaplain. Is there anything I can pray for you about?*** **That is their most needed "bombshell question" they have ever heard!** It is so shocking to them that anyone would come to where they are in the court halls to pray for them at their weakest undeserved moments. It is a 100% acceptance. Over these 23 years, the record of salvations, comfort, peace, hope, and miracles is countless not to include praying with countless couples waiting to get married every Friday! God alone keeps the records, and long-term results.

From this **"countywide perspective"** has risen the huge awareness for intercession for leaders we **NEVER SEE** – **judges, commissioners, mayors, or school board members.** Every Friday is our 12 noon intercession for **all leadership by name** that they will function in righteousness, truth, love, and integrity. This is impacting our county of 1.3 million pop. for righteousness though it's as if we have only begun.