

Gary Ray

Biographical Sketch

Conversion

I was born the second of two children into a non-Christian home. My parents had agreed never to talk about religion however they did teach me to live a good life and be respectful toward others. In the spring of my seventh-grade year, a friend invited me to participate in a church youth choir. I accepted the invitation and decided that since I was participating in the choir I should attend church as well. Over the next few months I learned that I was a sinner, I needed a savior and that Jesus who died on the cross and was resurrected on the third day was the savior I needed. One evening a youth group from a sister church presented a series of skits and plays about the end times. The truth of the gospel hit me at the end of that service like a ton of bricks. I understood that if Jesus came back that night I was in a heap of trouble. There was no reason for delay. I placed my faith in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior that evening.

Call to ministry

Through events in my life, and study of Scripture, God has impassioned me to lead people in worship of Him. Just a couple of years after accepting Christ, I was attending a mission's conference. While in attendance, an opportunity to serve as part of a choir that would tour Haiti to share Christ through song and testimony presented itself. I sensed God gently leading at that time and thought that He wanted me to be a part of that tour. However, my parents would not allow me to travel outside of the United States. I assumed that if God wanted me to go then he would clear the way. He did not clear the way. I then assumed that I was wrong about what I thought God was telling me. Years later, I found myself in Okinawa, Japan courtesy of the US Air Force. While there, I had the opportunity to sing in the choir as well as participate in performing special music in the church that I was attending. At one point, I was

sent TDY (that is temporary duty) to Missawa, Japan. While in Missawa, I attended an English language church that was not on base. They were preparing to host a youth weekend for Japanese teenagers. They had invited Japanese High School students to “Learn about the Bible, Learn English and Stay in American homes.” I had the opportunity to help lead in worship by singing a couple of songs. The kids really responded well. Of the 147 in attendance, 47 accepted Christ as their Savior. It was very exciting to take part in such a great move of God that had the result of changing so many lives through their encounter with the King of the Universe.

At that point, I really began to sense that God wanted to use me for His glory in the field of music. However, I thought God didn’t really understand the situation. Here I was a guy with no musical training and couldn’t play an instrument and He wanted to use me. I gave him all my excuses and He used my friend, Russ, to wipe them all away. After explaining to Russ that I thought God wanted to use me in music but that God must be wrong because I couldn’t read music, Russ just looked at me and said, “So. (long pause) That’s just academics, you can learn that.” I had forgotten that in our weakness He is strong.

Preparation for ministry

Once I realized, through that conversation with Russ, that God really did know what he was talking about, I decided that I should probably get some education, especially in the area of music. Russ was going to attend Carson-Newman College in east Tennessee and he told me that they had a great music department so I decided I would try to go there. I was accepted and spent four years studying music in my undergraduate work. During my time at Carson-Newman, I also participated in several short term summer and spring break mission trips which used music as a platform to share the gospel. At the end of my senior year, I contracted pharengitis which is just like larengitis but a little farther up in the

throat. I was able to finish my degree but lost my voice such that for a period of two years I could not sing for more than two minutes without losing my voice.

After graduation, I spent two years traveling with a music and drama ministry team that toured the United States. I was the soundman rather than a performer. As the soundman I had lots of opportunities to observe and I observed a lot. After having been to hundreds of churches and seeing how churches treated their pastors and how pastors treated churches, I really wanted no part of full time ministry. God allowed me to “cool my heels” in Atlanta, GA for a year and a half before letting me know it was time to go to Seminary. He used Henry Blackaby’s study, “Experiencing God” to let me know that it was time. Through that study He helped me understand that what I observed was not the way things are supposed to be in the church. He also showed me how God wants things to go in the church. At the end of the study the question was asked, “What is the next thing you need to do to further your walk with God?” I knew, though I tried to fight it, it was time to go to Seminary. So, I applied and was accepted at Dallas Theological Seminary. I started in the spring of 1996 and completed a Masters of Christian Education in 2002.

My preparation for ministry has continued while I have been at Oak Hills Community Church. I have grown in my understanding of music and the art of leading people in worship of God. I have also learned how to play guitar and continue to grow in that area.