

Wishard and Wanda Lemons

Ministry, running, community involvement—he did it all with his wife, Wanda by his side.

Chapter 1 - 1:34

Introduction

Announcer: Wishard Lemons was born in Muskogee, Oklahoma, in 1917, where he lived with his family until moving to Oklahoma City, where he finished high school. He earned his Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy at Oklahoma City University, a Master's Degree in Philosophy from the University of Oklahoma, and did graduate on a Ph.D. at Boston University. Over the years, he worked in radio, sold life insurance, and was the state director of CROP: Christian Rural Overseas Program. During World War II he served in the Navy in the Pacific. It wasn't until 1956 that he responded to the call to the ministry. In 1968, Wishard began his affiliation with First Methodist Church in Tulsa along with his good friend, Dr. L. D. "Bill" Thomas. It was there that First United member Bob Parker, Sr. challenged Wish to visit a Parker oil rig in Peru, which led to becoming Industrial Chaplain for Parker Drilling. He traveled to 135 rigs in 29 different countries tending to the psychological spiritual well-being of the employees. Wishard was married to Wanda Lemons for 54 years. In addition to supporting Wishard in his ministries, Wanda held various professional positions and had a long distinguished career with Tulsa Public Schools and Oral Roberts University. She and Wishard were avid runners and participated in almost every run in Tulsa for many years, including the Wish Lemons Run. Wanda died January 13, 2013. Listen to Wishard and Wanda tell their story, made possible by the supporting foundations of VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 2 - 7:11

World War II

John Erling: We have Wishard and Wanda Lemons with us here.

Wishard Lemons: Hi, John.

JE: And Wanda is here to keep us both on the straight and narrow. Isn't that right, Wanda?

Wanda Lemons (referenced as ML): We're here to enjoy.

JE: (Chuckles)

WL: Her voice is almost as low as mine, so they may get us mixed up.

JE: (Chuckles)

ML: When we were in early ministry, the other person at the end of the line always thought I was his teenage son.

JE: Is that right? That's funny. Wishard, you're birth date and year.

WL: December 17, 1917.

JE: So, today you are how old?

WL: Ninety-one.

JE: And, Wanda, we won't go into that with you.

WL: (Chuckles) She's a good deal younger. She's 12 years young than I.

ML: Telling secrets.

JE: Tell us where we are today.

WL: Montereau at Warren Woods. The most unusual, luxurious retirement center in the United States. They are building others comparable to this now, with this as a model. We've won all kinds of awards. It's just a fabulous place and we're the luckiest people on earth to live here, because even a millionaire, when he retires at an exclusive place, has no more amenities than we have right here.

JE: I'm sure they'll say you're one of the best salesman they ever had for it, too, as a matter of fact.

WL: (Chuckles) And they took care of me, too. I had three serious surgeries and they, of course, have a health center here, and the moment that surgery was done, instead of leaving me in the hospital, they put me in the health center here at Montereau because we have the same services they do.

ML: They brought you and spoiled you.

WL: Yeah, they spoiled me.

ML: Pampered you.

JE: Where were you born?

WL: I was born in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Lived there, except part of the time when we lived in Oktaha, Oklahoma, which is about 20 miles south of Muskogee. But when Alfalfa Bill Murray became the governor of the State of Oklahoma, we moved to Oklahoma City when I was 12 years old, and he went to work as the Assistant Clerk of the Supreme Court of Oklahoma and had total recall—this was before the days of computers or anything like that—he remembered all the cases that had ever been filed before the State Supreme Court and the attorneys all called him “Judge.”

ML: Who's he?

WL: I really enjoyed—I grew up in the State Capitol.

JE: In the State Capitol.

WL: That's right. He was working there and he got me a job there early, typing, because I could type about 40 words a minute without mistakes. You couldn't have any mistakes on the typing of these briefs. I was paid 40 or 50 cents a page. The most money I ever made for years afterwards. (Chuckles) The Clerk of the Supreme Court was elected in those days. They're appointed now, but they were elected then, and Gus Poole had been the Clerk of the Supreme Court for years. He retired. Why, Andy Payne became the Supreme Court. He ran for the office and got it. He could have run for Governor and become Governor. He was that popular in Oklahoma. When he ran across the United States with the Shell Oil Company from New York to California and ran off and left 300 people or more that ran in the race with him. He was an Indian and running was a piece of cake to him, and everybody in Oklahoma said he ran through our town. That was how popular he was in those days. (Chuckles)

JE: Native American.

WL: Oh, yeah. Native American.

JE: Yeah.

WL: He was in all the papers all across the United States.

JE: Let's bring you to school. You went to...

WL: Oklahoma City University. Undergraduate. They did a fine job with less than 1,000 students then. Now, it's huge. You've got a quarter of a mile campus out in Oklahoma City. In those days, we had a football team. They won—they beat Oklahoma and every other university, but then they discovered that all our players were firemen. These guys working in the fire station, they went to school at OCU, so they canceled it. Then we got out of the football business and stayed with basketball and became national champions in basketball.

JE: How about that. Were you an athlete? Did you play?

WL: Oh, no. I wanted to be. I exercised all the time. I had 16-inch biceps and I could chin with one hand—either hand—but my equilibrium is no good. My lower extremities I had inherited from my mother and I'm not mede and flatfooted. I thought it was going to keep me out of the service during World War II. But you know what? It never did. But what it did do was keep me from becoming an officer. This is before World War II when I went into the Navy in June of '41, because I didn't know there was going to be a war. I was in Boston starving to death, had no money at all, had an assistantship that paid my tuition and some expenses, but it was terrible, so I finally just gave up and decided on the 90-day wonder they had and I applied for it and I got it because I had so much education. But when I got to Chicago to take the training at the naval training station

there, they discovered my teeth didn't meet right. This is when those standards were being used, so they said, "I'm sorry, we can't give you an honorable discharge. We can't give you a discharge."

ML: You mean they couldn't give you a dishonorable discharge.

WL: They couldn't give me dishonorable—I'm sorry.

ML: And they couldn't give you...

WL: Or an honorable because I'd only been in a day and a half, "So we're going to give you a good discharge," and sent me back to Oklahoma City three days later with my tail between my legs, embarrassed absolutely out of my gourd. I couldn't go become an officer.

JE: But you could have, had your physically been right.

WL: Oh, yeah. Later on, I served under officers who (indiscernible), you know. They've changed.

JE: You've had several careers in your lifetime.

WL: Yes, I have.

JE: And so out of Oklahoma City University, what did you do then?

WL: Boston University.

JE: That was your Master's Degree?

WL: My Master's and my Ph.D.

JE: I didn't know you were a doctor!

WL: Well, I didn't get it. I didn't finish.

JE: Oh, you didn't finish. Okay.

WL: I was so broke, I finally gave up. I had to do something.

JE: Then what did you...

WL: The navy offered this 90-day wonder program...

JE: Okay.

WL: So I went into that. That gave my whole attention to the navy, so when I flunked out, I just walked across the hall and joined the navy. Well, there I couldn't even get anywhere because I didn't know shorthand, so I finally wound up a 3rd Class Petty Officer Yeoman and they shipped me to San Diego with me assuming that I was going with all the other guys on the train with me to boot camp and get some training. Well, I walked through the turnstile, gave my orders to this guy and he walked about 20 feet and he said, "Hey, Lemons, come here!" He said, "What are you doing here?" "Well, I came here for boot training." He says, "Well, that ain't what your orders say." "Well, what do they say?" He says, "You're to be transferred to the USS San Francisco, a heavy cruiser. It's gonna be out in Los Angeles here shortly." I liked to fell over backwards. I didn't know how to pack a sea bag. When I got all my stuff, I just crammed it all in there, got on the train and I slept overnight and they put me on the

USS San Francisco the next day without a day's training. I think I'm one of the few or only ones in the United States' history that ever got into the navy without any training whatsoever.

JE: Wow. So, then, how many years?

WL: Four years, six months. I went out of the navy after World War II. I was the most surprised guy in the world at being in war. I never thought about that. I just thought about the income I was going to get.

JE: So, then, that would have brought you to about 1944.

WL: Yeah, I came back in January '44 trained to be a chaplain.

Chapter 3 - 6:27

Radio - Spurgeon

JE: When you got out of the navy you went back to Oklahoma City?

WL: Yes, back to Oklahoma City, and went to OU for six months. Then went to Boston.

JE: Somewhere along the line, you did do radio work.

WL: Oh, yeah. I was doing radio work during college at OCU. I would go up and do evening programs on all the stations, practically. Well, WKY, KOMA and KOCY. Those three.

JE: And you worked in those stations?

WL: Yeah, never full-time until I went to KOCY. There I stayed for five years and really had a great time.

JE: What did you do on the stations?

WL: I was a...

JE: Disc jockey?

WL: Disc jockey. Yeah. I finally was promoted to be program director.

JE: So this would have been in the forties.

WL: Yes.

JE: What kind of music did you play? The big bands and the Sinatras and all those kind of things?

WL: We had some local dance halls in Oklahoma City and I went in the evenings to their dance halls and broadcast from the dance halls.

JE: So you emceed the event then?

WL: Yeah. It was exciting. But I always was very hesitant about speaking even though I was on the radio. I didn't know how to say something without getting all mixed up, so I took the Dale Carnegie Course. I found out that you could get that tuition-free. The government

would pay for it. It was the most life-changing event in my whole life, that Dale Carnegie Course. When I came out of that, I was free to talk, finally.

JE: What do you think they gave you? Confidence?

WL: Yes. Confidence—and knowledge. That Dale Carnegie Course was fabulous.

JE: You had all this training and all this college behind...

WL: Did the oratory at OCU in competition, so I knew how to speak formally, but I didn't know how to be free on the microphone like you. I would have admired you—that's what I wanted to do is what you did.

JE: You did your radio career for five years or longer?

WL: Yeah. Mm hmm.

JE: And then what happened?

WL: Oh, I had this training in philosophy. I had a Master's in philosophy and an undergraduate in philosophy. What I wanted to be was a philosopher in some ivy colored college in the East as a professor of philosophy. That was my ambition in life up until that moment. The radio changed that to a certain extent, gave me a little broader vision of what I might be able to do, but going into ministry wasn't one of the things that I had planned on. Our pastor at Saint Luke's in Oklahoma City was W. McPheron Stowe. He later became a bishop in the Methodist church. He absolutely overwhelmed me. I tell you. He showed me that you could be friendly. He used to be relaxed with everybody just like anybody else. A preacher. People still today, "Are you really a preacher?" They ask me that. And the second question is, "Are you still driving?" (Chuckles)

JE: (Chuckles) So that was your first seed...

WL: Mack Stowe made preaching attractive to me and it made me realize, you know, I've got the equipment and the talent for that, my philosophical background geared me for that and then guys like Billy Graham converted me, you know. I was a Christian. I was raised in the church a Christian. I was raised in the church, so nothing unfamiliar about that to me. I never thought about being a minister, but I found that my talents all moved in that direction.

ML: Also, Mack Stowe was a great, caring man.

WL: Yeah.

ML: And he loved people. He drew me into Methodism.

WL: He was raised a Baptist.

ML: I went to him for an interview when I was working in the state capitol because I was ready to change my career.

WL: She was one of four secretaries that Raymond Gary had.

JE: The governor?

ML: Well, I was on his staff.

JE: Uh huh.

ML: I took care of the welfare people and I was a correspondence secretary, too.

JE: Wishard, you reference Billy Graham.

WL: Oh, yeah.

JE: Did you have a moment there at a crusade or anything?

WL: Every time he showed up, I attended whatever preaching services he had downtown in Oklahoma City and just overwhelmed with him and everything. He touched my heart, Mack Stowe's heart, and all of our hearts there at Oklahoma City, I think. Thousands of us came to his services.

JE: Was there a point that you point back to that was your conversion time when you...

WL: It was during that time with Billy Graham. I was baptized as an infant and so was told that I was a Christian, but the emotional part of it was not there.

JE: Let's find out what you were doing before you finally gave in to the call. Various job?

WL: Well, the radio business.

JE: Yes.

WL: I sold life insurance. They told me that life insurance was next to the ministry so far as people-helping. I wanted to help people.

JE: Okay. So as you, then, were in the insurance business, was something brewing in your brain about the ministry?

WL: Yeah.

ML: You moved from there to CROP.

WL: That's right. I became the State Director for Christian Rural Overseas Program—C-R-O-P. They hired me and I was amazed! I had a state office. I traveled all over the State of Oklahoma talking to farmers and county agents.

ML: And collecting wheat to be sent overseas to the poor.

WL: The missionaries around the world.

JE: Okay. So in essence, you entered ministry at that point.

WL: That's right.

JE: That was your first.

WL: Yeah.

JE: All right.

WL: Except that I didn't think of myself that way.

JE: But then, was the call to enter formal ministry still on your mind and were you fighting with it? Were you rejecting it?

WL: Yeah. Yeah, I was. My philosophical background probably gave me an advantage over a lot of people, but in my heart I knew there was more to it than philosophy. People like Billy Graham. And Gerald Kennedy—his books—he's a great minister.

ML: How about some of the older ministers?

WL: Oh, yeah. I fell in love with Spurgeon. I just discovered him by accident in the library, and he was next to Saint Paul, probably one of the greatest preachers who've ever preached.

JE: Charles Spurgeon, right?

WL: S-p-u-r-g-e-o-n.

JE: Yeah. So you read his books.

WL: Yeah. He was way back there—preached in England. He also had, usually, 5,000 people. He sat up there and had people writing it down as he preached and now that form of Bible preaching plus another one on miracles.

ML: When we downsized to move to Montereau, guess what we kept for our library?

WL: Yeah.

ML: His Spurgeon collection.

WL: And most of my sermons came out of Spurgeon. In fact, I used to have a lot of fun with my first church. I told them, "Now, folks, you all won't need to worry about hearing great preachers. If there are great sermons preached, I'll preach them from this pulpit." (Chuckles)

WL: Yeah.

Chapter 4 - 9:29

Call to Ministry

JE: So you worked for CROP.

WL: Uh huh.

JE: Is there a point where you finally decide, "You know what? I need to go into..."

WL: All this time I was counseled by W. McPheron Stowe, the pastor at St. Luke's in Oklahoma City. He said, "Now, Wishard, if you want to get a Ph.D. and go on with the philosophy, I can get you a church up there in that area where you want to study. You could live there," and I thought about that, but somehow or another it didn't quite click with me.

ML: You were really an Okie.

WL: I was an Okie and I didn't want to go up East. And you know what I did? When I graduated from seminary at Drew Seminary in Madison, New Jersey, they offered me a church up in Vermont.

ML: They had a nice little church for you up in Vermont.

WL: Yeah.

ML: And they wanted you to go to Vermont and you would make them very happy if all you did was occasionally in your sermons mention the Blood of the Lamb.

WL: Oh, yeah. The Blood of the Lamb. I'd been to seminary and I didn't know anything about

the Blood of the Lamb. (Chuckles) Well, that shook me up. So I decided then, well I'm just not ready for the ministry.

JE: You'd been to the seminary, but you didn't incorporate the Blood of the Lamb...

WL: No. The seminary didn't go that form. That's why the bishop didn't want to send Bill Thomas to seminary because he'd been one of the outstanding practicing attorneys in the United States because he says, "I'm afraid you'll lose your religion." (Chuckles) Bishop Andrew Smith said that.

JE: And so the crucifixion of Christ was not referred, then, in your...

WL: No, resurrection.

JE: Or the resurrection.

WL: Yeah, yeah. The crucifixion was all right, but not the resurrection.

JE: Okay.

WL: Yeah.

JE: Where is the turning point in your life when you say, "Okay, I give in to the ministry?"

ML: John, I want to preface what he might say with the fact that he had trouble with intellectualism. He was intellectually fighting this battle. His intellect was winning and he had to struggle with that.

JE: Your brain said, "I know what I should be doing."

WL: Yeah.

JE: But then there was a part of you that didn't want to?

WL: Yeah.

ML: He grew up asleep on the church pews from an infant on. His parents were very, very involved. His father was great in the field of music.

JE: And their names were?

WL: Wishard. I'm a junior.

ML: Wishard and Vienna.

WL: Name same as mine—and Vienna Lemons.

JE: Okay. And they were all in Oklahoma?

WL: Muskogee. At First Methodist Church in Muskogee. I grew up while they were in the choir. He was a singer.

JE: Intellectually, you knew you should become a minister.

WL: Well, I knew there was a God and I believed in Jesus Christ, but only intellectually. It was not a heartfelt thing at all.

JE: Bring me to the point that you finally put it all together.

WL: Well, I didn't have any sudden night at the altar if you mean that, no. I was too intellectual. I'm still an intellectual. I love to read philosophical things. I'm just not moved too much that way. I'm emotional, but I'm mainly intellectual.

JE: Okay, what happened? You made a decision at some time to go into the ministry.

WL: Yeah.

JE: How did that happen?

WL: Well, I went to seminary and then I came back to Oklahoma and went back in the radio business.

JE: Why?

WL: Well, I didn't know what else to do. I had to make a living some way.

JE: But you had gone through the seminary. Why wouldn't you go on to a church?

WL: Well, I would have to join the Methodist Conference to do that.

ML: He didn't want to be related to people...

WL: I think somebody else telling me where I was going to live and all that type of thing.

JE: (Chuckles)

WL: Yeah.

JE: Well, why did you go into the seminary when you knew what you would probably be ending up doing?

WL: The end of '43 I was still in the South Pacific. I didn't leave there until January of '44. I went over before the Pearl Harbor thing.

ML: Forty-one.

WL: Yeah, '41. So I was in four years and six months. During that time, the last year and a half, I spent in the seminary training to be a chaplain.

JE: Okay.

WL: A chaplain.

JE: I see.

WL: And that I was willing to do, but then the atomic bomb came and ruined that for me.

ML: And saved the world.

WL: And I just—the next day I went to New York. I had all these points from action on the Frisco. I could get out. All I had to do was go in and tell them that I had all these points and they let me out. I came back and I didn't know how I was going to stay in seminary. Still had another semester to go. And I'll be darned, a Presbyterian church gave me a scholarship for the rest of my seminary work, all expenses paid. I didn't even know anything about the Presbyterian Church.

ML: He didn't understand where it came from.

WL: No, I never did and I still don't know where that came from.

ML: When the Presbyterian Church offered you a ministry.

WL: Yeah.

JE: They offered you the scholarship.

WL: Yeah, and back in Oklahoma City I preached my first sermons in Presbyterian churches,

and the old boy really liked me and I preached because I was intellectual enough. They're kind of intellectual, you know.

JE: Then you're also back in radio?

WL: Yeah, I went back into radio.

ML: You might tell him at this point that you had a girlfriend from college who was waiting for you and for four and a half years, five years, she waited.

WL: Yeah, Lord. That poor girl. I don't know whatever happened to her.

ML: They did that back then in the olden days.

WL: See, I disappeared. Literally disappeared because I was shipped to Pearl Harbor and then in just a few days, I was onboard ship. Correspondence was out and I never saw her again.

ML: I thought, though, that you married her. You're talking about one girl and I'm talking about another one.

WL: No, I didn't marry anybody.

ML: Elizabeth.

WL: Oh, yeah. Well, yeah, I had a girlfriend in Oklahoma City. Yeah, and we kept in contact with each other and she died, though, at 36 with a cerebral hemorrhage.

JE: Mm.

WL: I'd taken my first appointment. I'd really gone into the ministry.

ML: You had gotten sent.

WL: And here is the way the Lord blessed me by taking my wife, and that gave me offense. Then I had some real intellectual problems. But, you know what, it improved my preaching. It made me realize what people go through when they lost children or a wife and that became the big part of my ministry was doing funerals. Even then, the first thing out of the box, because I had been right where they are. My poor old grandma, years ago, died over in Porum, Oklahoma. I traveled from New Mexico to Oklahoma to go to her funeral, and that guy, he read scripture and ritual and if I hadn't known whose funeral it was, I would have figured I was in the wrong place.

JE: Hmm.

WL: And at that moment I decided if I ever preach, it's not going to be like that. I'm not going to do ritual and all that. I'm going to talk about people that are out there in the congregation and what troubles they're going through. That became the whole source of my ministry was to try to help people through these agonizing experiences that we have in life.

ML: See, his conversion experience was prolonged. It didn't happen in an instant.

JE: Right.

ML: It developed.

WL: Of course, I've been studying philosophy since I was in junior high school.

JE: You were preaching in some of the Presbyterian churches.

WL: Yeah.

JE: And then somewhere along the line here, you get into the ministry full-time with the Methodists.

WL: Well, I took an appointment. They appointed me.

JE: The Methodists.

WL: Uh huh.

ML: Because you continued worshiping at First Methodist with your wife and three children.

WL: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And they appointed me to Harrah, Oklahoma. Really, it wasn't a whole lot of change in my mind or my heart, because I had that all along. Even in radio I had it. I never missed church. I studied. I was curious about where did we come from, where we're going, why we were here, how do you fulfill this life. All those questions were very important to me.

JE: Well, I'm quite certain that you also talked to many others. Unknowingly, you had a ministry.

WL: Oh, yeah.

JE: You had been doing it all along.

WL: Yeah. Mm hmm.

JE: And now, though, you're then into the ministry of the Methodist church.

ML: Wishard was 38 years old when he answered the call to the ministry through the Methodist church. In Oklahoma City, Mack Stowe—Bishop Mack Stowe—was working with him on a regular basis. He belonged to a group of two or three hundred young men and women who had come home from the war. He was in his 30's. He participated actively. They even climbed through the window of the church when it was locked so that they could pray.

WL: Mack Stowe let me preach from his pulpit. That's a huge church in that time, eight or nine thousand members.

ML: And this was all growing and eventually he developed pericarditis.

WL: Oh, yeah.

ML: An inflammation of the sac around the heart and became very, very ill, and Mack Stowe worked with him through this period. And Mack finally said, "Wishard, you must face reality. Your call is so loud and clear and you're so pro at ignoring it—at passing on beyond it. You must deal with that now."

WL: Yeah.

ML: And that's when he decided that he ought to consider the ministry seriously. They were very poor. He had three little boys and it was in the 40's?

WL: Mm hmm.

ML: You were 38 when you literally signed on to become a minister in the Methodist church.

WL: I'm glad she's part of my life.

ML: And when—I did not know him at this time, but I was working with the singles leadership program in Oklahoma City. His name was given to me as one of my speakers, one of my programs. I didn't like the name so I didn't call him.

WL: She didn't like my name. (Chuckles)

Chapter 5 - 6:00

First Methodist

ML: But during that time he was in St. Luke's Church, very actively involved in this total program.

WL: Teaching Sunday school.

ML: I was also there, but we did not know each other because I was in the singles area and I was at the state capitol then. I had been to Washington and had returned. And Wishard made quite a flash when he went into the ministry because the bishop didn't quite understand his personality. You know, it is kind of unique. The bishop sent him to a student pastorate 20 miles out of Oklahoma City.

WL: At Harrah.

ML: And said, "Now develop this little student pastorate church in Harrah into a full-time church." And at the end of one year from conference to conference, he had done that and that really turned the church on its ear.

WL: And then about two weeks later, my wife died. Left me with those three boys.

ML: The church took over.

WL: Oh, yeah.

ML: And literally saved him from himself.

WL: And all my churches have been that way. They've been my support in addition to me helping them. Yeah.

JE: That had to be a terrible time for you when your wife died.

WL: Yeah, it was. But it brought me closer to the Lord.

JE: You didn't go through one of these, "God, why did you do this to me?"

WL: Well, theologically I did, yes, but I've run into that question before.

ML: He was angry.

JE: Were you angry?

WL: Well, no, I wasn't fighting it. I knew that...

ML: No, you weren't fighting, but you were angry as you stood in the hospital hallway.

WL: Yeah.

ML: And heard Elizabeth pronounced...

WL: Dead.

ML: As being dead.

WL: Yeah.

JE: Who became your minister then? Who was helping you through that?

ML: Mack Stowe.

WL: Mack Stowe. I was out of the pulpit for two weeks.

ML: Oh, he wanted to preach the Sunday after she was gone, but they would not let him.

WL: But the next week I did, and it electrified my ministry because I became aware that Elizabeth was alive and she was all right and that I was going to be that way one of these days myself.

JE: Yeah.

WL: Yeah.

JE: Let's bring you to First Methodist Church in downtown Tulsa. How did that happen?

WL: L. D. Thomas, most powerful minister who ever had it at First Methodist, and I were friends from World War II. He was a captain in the infantry. I was in the navy, you know, clean. I had a hospital with me and everything. Old' Bill was a captain in the infantry. He made all the major landings in Europe and Africa.

ML: He was on the ground.

WL: He was full of shrapnel and all that stuff. And we were real buddies. Closer than brothers. He was legal counsel for Consolidated Gas Utilities and had argued before the Supreme Court. I already had all this seminary training and I was talking to him all the time, so I got him convinced that he would be in the ministry.

ML: Now, you need to tell that Bill and Harriet and you and Elizabeth bought little GI houses on the same block in Oklahoma City when you returned from the war. And they became very close friends and that was the part of the group that wanted to pray so badly that they would literally climb in through the church window when the custodian forgot to open it to do their morning prayers.

WL: Yeah, yeah. At St. Luke. Yeah.

ML: That was while you were raising your three boys and they were adopting their three children.

WL: Oh, yeah. Bill never had a child of his own. He and his wife adopted three children.

JE: Mm hmm.

ML: We stayed close to Bill.

WL: He's exactly a year younger than I am. When he was appointed to First Methodist, I called him on the phone and told him, "Now, look, when you come into your kingdom, don't forget me!" So, he went to work. It took him two years to get the bishop finally convinced that he could move me from—he had appointed me to Carlsbad, New Mexico and to Roswell, New Mexico. And I was at Roswell at the time. And he didn't want to bring me

back to Oklahoma, but Bill kept on pushing and using his gift of salesmanship until the bishop finally agreed to appoint me as his associate at First Methodist. And, you know, they made me the co-pastor and then the church out-ruled it, said you can't do that, there can only be one minister in the church. You can't be a co-pastor.

JE: At First Methodist downtown?

WL: Yes, and Bill wanted me to be his co-pastor, because I had a heck of a lot to do with bringing him into the ministry.

ML: Well, when Wishard and I met, after he decided that he was very interested in me, he said, "You have to meet a very important man in my life," and he took me out for an evening with Bill Thomas, who was at that time practicing law, and Bill Thomas was secretly studying duplicating Wishard's library.

WL: Yeah, because he didn't even want him to go to seminary. He's afraid he'd lose his religion, so they gave him the course of study.

ML: But all during our dating for the year that we were dating, I did not know that Bill was going into the ministry.

WL: Yeah.

ML: No one knew he was under Wishard's tutelage.

WL: Well, Bill was afraid it would destroy his practice of law.

ML: Well, the bishop did not want this publicized because there were too many changes that had to be made. Professional, spiritual, this type thing. And when Bill and Wishard took me out for the evening, they broke the news to me and, of course, I had been calling Bill to come work with my single program, because I liked his name. (Chuckles)

ML: And his wife and I ended up becoming friends. It was a big ceremony, sharing it with me. We kept that a secret for a full year until Bill had his course of study completed.

WL: She was actually trying to go into full-time ministry herself. Not as a preacher, but into the ministry.

JE: Wanda, you're talking about?

ML: Yes.

WL: Her complaint was, "But I want to go full-time into the ministry," and that's when I gave her the word. I said, "Look, what do you think a preacher's wife is doing? She's in full-time ministry."

ML: So I've tagged along with you ever since.

WL: (Laughs)

ML: I've never wanted to do any great accomplishments outside of working with him.

Chapter 6 – 7:23**Lay Witness Mission**

JE: L. D. Thomas, Bill, comes to First Methodist and then the issue of you being a co-pastor—that didn't seem to play?

WL: Yeah.

JE: Did you start out as a co-pastor?

WL: Well, Bill and I thought we were, but the bishop...

ML: Yeah, we did. I have the newspapers with it.

JE: So you came in as co-pastors.

WL: Yeah.

JE: And that didn't work.

WL: Huh uh.

JE: Why didn't it work?

WL: Well, James Swearingen, President of Bank of Oklahoma, he's a member there, and he says, "We've got to have one man in charge here." So Bill—they have him salary of \$12,000 a year and gave me \$10,000 a year.

ML: That was a few years back.

WL: Can you imagine? Now the pastor at First Methodist is getting about \$150,000 a year.

JE: Was that okay with you? How did you take that?

WL: Oh, fine. Fine.

ML: They had already chosen brothers.

WL: We didn't have any problem with it at all.

ML: Wishard has always been able to take directions. He has not been an administrative man. Bill was high in administrative abilities and skills.

WL: Yeah.

JE: So then you became the associate pastors.

WL: Yes, uh huh.

JE: And that was a good combination?

WL: Yeah. He got me there because, "Wishard, I'm having around 50 funerals a year. I don't have time to do them and when people get sick in the hospital, they want me to come. I had two associates. They don't want them. They go and they visit and they say, 'Well, please send Dr. Thomas.'" He said, "I've got to somebody here who can replace me in the field of funerals and hospital. So that's what I did, and it worked.

ML: Harriett, his wife, while we were socially together said, "Wishard, what Bill needs to get this First Methodist ministry going is someone like you." We were having a social evening together.

WL: Yeah, that's a whole other story because I brought in the thing called Lay Witness Mission from Carlsbad and Roswell. It converted First Methodist Church. The weekend that we had it—it was Friday, Saturday and Sunday, people who were members there for years didn't go because the preacher wasn't preaching. And the next Sunday they came back and didn't recognize their own church. It literally physically changed the entire church.

JE: Tell us about that again.

WL: Well, couples were in the halls praying for each other, sitting down on the floor and having leg lengthenings.

JE: There was a healing that was going on.

WL: Well, the healing ministry—see, Oral had an influence in this, you know. Bill three-pronged ministry was preaching, teaching and healing. They were all a part of the Gospel. Healing is never emphasized in the Methodist church.

ML: Well, it was many, many centuries ago.

JE: So this Lay...

ML: The Lay Witness Mission.

JE: Lay Witness Mission.

ML: It was the layman's program.

JE: You brought it in.

WL: Yeah. We brought men in from four or five states to witness for a weekend. We brought 100 of them and they lived in our houses, not in motels or hotels.

ML: Laymen from other churches.

WL: Yeah, and no expense. They paid their own expense and came—laymen did. They were firemen, lawyers, doctors, postmen, laborers, and witnessed about life before I met Christ, what happened when I met Christ, what life's been like since I met Christ. Those are the three points they all gave.

JE: You brought the personal relationship with Christ...

WL: I brought that into the church.

JE: Into the church.

WL: Yeah, and Bill just loved it.

JE: It was a revival kind of, then...

WL: Oh, yeah!

JE: That broke out.

WL: Yes. It was a revival, but it wasn't a...

ML: It wasn't a preaching revival.

WL: It was the Holy Spirit—was moving and healing people.

JE: But lives were revived.

WL: Mm hmm.

- JE:** So you can call it that from that standpoint. And many hadn't realized that concept of a personal relationship with Christ before?
- WL:** No.
- JE:** And so then...
- WL:** Oh, they were at the altar, man. We had (indiscernible) in the altar of that church. Get up there.
- JE:** Okay, so then, did this go on...
- WL:** It went for years.
- ML:** For years.
- JE:** The next Sunday and then Dr. Thomas picked up on that and was preaching that.
- WL:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. He was in favor of this a hundred percent. He felt it the same that everybody else did.
- ML:** But when the group came to the church...
- WL:** Yeah.
- ML:** The leaders said, "Where is your senior minister? We cannot do this without his approval." Well, you contacted Bill...
- WL:** And got him involved.
- ML:** And Bill came down and immediately we were off and running.
- WL:** Yeah. Oh, yeah.
- ML:** And Bill never stopped it.
- WL:** A hundred percent behind it.
- JE:** What did the bishop of the district think about all this?
- ML:** Well, it spread all over.
- WL:** People thought we were Pentecostal, holy rollers. Here in Tulsa, the church exploded. I mean, we went from 350 in attendance on Sunday morning, you know, to 2,000 to 3,000 and that type of thing. Preachers came to our services. "What's going on here at First Methodist Church?" We were growing so fast.
- ML:** Warren Holgren came.
- WL:** Warren Holgren came over to the church.
- JE:** Pastor of First Baptist Church downtown.
- WL:** Yeah. And we were buddies, you know, doing funerals the same way. Oh, he was precious. I've been out to see him recently. He's out at University Village.
- JE:** So then it remained alive...
- WL:** Oh, yeah.
- JE:** Because Dr. Thomas preached it from the pulpit.
- WL:** He preached it.
- ML:** Every Sunday he had someone who had experienced the Lay Witness Mission whose life

was changed in the pulpit to share for months into years, and we formed groups. This is part of the basic program. We formed groups of lay people who have an experience this weekend to go out of state to different areas to tell them to deliver this mission.

JE: Mm hmm.

ML: We signed up to go on Lay Witness missions.

JE: Was speaking in tongues part of this experience?

WL: No.

JE: Not at that point?

WL: We had times, "Those of you who wish to speak in tongues, we will allow you to do so."

JE: But it wasn't the focus of that yet basically.

WL: No.

ML: No. As a matter of fact, two or so years later, I was a friend with the people who led ours. They lived in Palestine, Texas. I called them on the phone and said, "When you talked to us and you were talking about how the Spirit worked in your life and the movement that followed, were you pointing in any way to glossolalia?"

WL: Glossolalia is speaking in tongues.

ML: I asked them that. "Now that you're mature in your faith and you are asking the question, yes, we've had that experience."

JE: Okay.

ML: And that was creeping in all over. Wishard and another minister who was there at the time called Oral and we went out and spent an evening with Oral, with him praying for us to know how to handle...

WL: First Methodist.

ML: First Methodist in relationship to this pluralism.

JE: Because you must have had other Methodist minister in this area...

WL: Oh, yeah. They came to see.

JE: Yeah, but there must have been some, too, who were skeptical of this.

ML: Who were anti...

WL: Oh, very. Very skeptical. See, like Boston Avenue and First Methodist are almost like two different churches, although they're the same.

JE: And even at that time, then, they did not come in and embrace...

WL: They were...no.

JE: They did not embrace the lay witness ministry.

WL: No, they weren't excited about it. They had great preachers there.

ML: And they had great ministry.

WL: It never affected as many laymen at once as the lay witness mission did.

ML: We went from 300 on a Sunday morning attendance to even higher than we are now.

JE: What year was this in?

ML: 1969. We had been here less than a year.

WL: Yeah, that's the first thing I did.

ML: That was your first thing. And later I asked some of the leaders, "Why did you all turn Wishard loose like that?" And they said, "Well, he came here pretty highly built and we just wanted to see what he would do." You were an unknown to them.

Chapter 7 - 4:49

Speaking in Tongues

JE: Tell me a little more about the funerals that you would conduct.

WL: Well, I did eulogies. I centered the funeral on the bereaved and on the deceased. If I didn't get laughs at a funeral, I figured I'd failed.

JE: If people didn't laugh, you had failed.

WL: That's right, because I told the real life story of these people I was burying...

ML: You honored their lives.

WL: Most preachers wouldn't bring up. Now they're doing it, you know, all over the place. I made them live again in the presence of the bereaved.

ML: And you highlighted their spiritual growth and development.

WL: Yes.

ML: Anything that had been involved in their lives. People loved it.

WL: At their birth, and what was it like when you were a child?

JE: Mm hmm.

WL: And did you go to church?

JE: And then the Tulsa World did a story.

WL: Yeah. A feature on Sunday of the last two eulogists, one Holgren and Wish Lemons. Yeah. Warren and I have been close ever since.

JE: Tell me again about Oral Roberts and how much he helped you.

WL: Oral, like Wanda says, it was just a matter of weeks that Wanda and I went out and had supper with Oral. He said, "The first thing I want you to do is—you all really build that church well—is have the nicest nursery in town. I want you to have a doctor or a nurse in charge. I don't want people allowed to walk in and out anytime they want to and get their kids."

ML: He wanted hospital standards in the nursery.

WL: "I want hospital standards in that nursery. I want you to do construction of the place so it's comforting and fine for the kids." And you know what? That started at First Methodist.

People came from 20 miles. They came from these towns from around here to bring their kids into our nursery.

ML: Oral predicted that.

WL: Yeah.

ML: Oral told us that would happen.

WL: And you'll get young people. Young couples is what you need.

ML: From Okmulgee and surrounding...

WL: The best advice. We have a building campaign going on there now that has been slowed by this recession.

ML: More space for the children and youth.

WL: And a bigger, more exciting building. We've got a youth and family center there that's huge, but we wanted to fix it so it would be more attractive to the kids.

ML: And more adequate.

JE: But Oral counseled you, too, because it was a point in your life when you thought about speaking in tongues.

WL: Oh, yeah, we talked at length about it.

ML: Wishard couldn't do it. (Chuckles)

JE: And, so, tell me about that.

WL: Well, I wanted to—I knew it was authentic. It's in the Scripture. I kept telling Oral, "I don't know what's wrong with me. Something is wrong. I cannot receive the gift of tongues."

ML: He sent you to every intellectual professor he hired out there.

WL: Yeah.

ML: We went to all of them.

WL: One of them was really a super EI teacher.

ML: Dr. Irwin.

WL: Irwin.

ML: I-r-w-i-n.

WL: Yeah.

JE: Does Kathryn Kullman come in here some place?

WL: Yes.

ML: We heard through Bill Broadhurst about this woman who had this great spiritual gift and how she ministered all over the USA. Her name was Kathryn Kullman. Bill Broadhurst said to Wishard, "Well, go. I'll send you to wherever you want to go and you hear this woman and make up your own mind." Well, pretty soon we heard that she was coming to Tulsa. She was in the newspapers. So we slipped out of our evening service—disappeared—and went to where she was. We did this several times over a period of months. And we called that "bootlegging" Kathryn in.

JE: (Chuckles) She tried to help you speak in tongues.

WL: Oh, yeah. She tried to. That's when I had this wild moment. We had this big service. She was there for a week.

ML: Bill brought her in for a week's services.

WL: Yeah, and paid her an honorarium and everything. It was Wednesday night and I was her catcher. She would actually walk down the center aisle at First Methodist Church and people would reach out their hand and come up to her, you know. She's just touch them and they'd fall right there in the sanctuary. We had to have somebody there to keep them from falling...

ML: Yeah, and she knew your history, too.

WL: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

JE: That's what we call "slain in the Spirit."

WL: Slain the Spirit, yeah. On Wednesday night, I was catching and I happened to catch this person and ease them down and then she reached over and just touched my head and I went out like light and collapsed on the floor.

JE: You...

WL: Oh, yeah.

JE: So she touched your head and then what happened?

WL: I just passed out. Then I jumped up. I came to, instantly, and I yelled, "You tricked me!" (Chuckles) Because I wasn't expecting that.

ML: She just smiled.

WL: Yeah.

JE: And the feeling was, you literally blacked out.

WL: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I phased out.

JE: She had that power.

WL: And jumped up that quick.

ML: She was using that power from somewhere on high.

JE: But even through all of that, you still could not speak in tongues. That's when Oral said...

WL: "Quit seeking the gift and start seeking the Giver."

ML: Because the Giver is what we're after.

WL: Yeah, not tongues. It's the Giver that's important.

Chapter 8 – 9:05**Bob Parker**

JE: Let's bring you to Bob Parker.

WL: I had been there about six years at First Methodist. I knew he was the most powerful man in the church. He and Bill Broadhurst gave most of the money.

JE: Tell us who Bill Broadhurst is.

WL: Bill Broadhurst was one of the pioneer oilmen. When I came here, he was old. He was still younger than some, but I connected with some real unusual people. He'd send me to Asbury to revivals. Pay my way there. Pick any sermon you hear that you really like, come back and preach it to me.

ML: He said, "I want you to bring the best sermon here."

WL: "You preach it to me right here in this office." And so I did that, and I went five, six times down to Asbury at those outdoor meetings where they brought the top evangelists in from all over the country.

ML: He called Wishard "Wizard". He could not say Wish.

WL: Wishard.

JE: Okay, then Bob Parker.

WL: I liked his mother. I met her. Of course, she went to the hospital and I would visit her, so we became real close.

ML: And she loved you.

WL: And she loved me and I loved her. And Bob was a little bit aloof. He never admits people into his life at all.

ML: Well, he's very careful about it and you were risky.

WL: About months—six years later, he stopped me in the hall of First Methodist Church. That must have been...

ML: 1974.

WL: Yeah, and said, "Wish, I've been watching you operate around here and I'd like to try an experiment. Would you like to go down and live on one of my rigs in Peru in South America for a week and see what happens?" Well, gosh, I hadn't been since World War II any place except to Broken Arrow. (Chuckles) No money or anything like that, so I said, "Sure! I'd be glad to go." And he says, "Okay, be in my office at 10:00 in the morning and I'll let you know what you're going to do." The next morning at 10:00 I showed up. Now, he was the Chief Executive Officer, Chairman, and part owner of Parker Drilling Company. He said, "Now, Wishard, you've got some restrictions on you. I don't want you to go out there and do anything churchy." He says, "I'm working in countries where they

don't allow Christian ministers in there. You can't proselytize. If you did, you'll get my company kicked out of the country. If I ever hear of you buttonholing anybody for Jesus Christ, you're fired." He said, "All you want to do is three things. You're going to listen and that's something you don't know to do. You preachers talk all the time. You never listen. Secondly, I want you to encourage whenever you can and help whenever you can. Just listen, encourage and help." That's all.

ML: Those are all things that you used to do.

WL: "Now, in the helping, you've got my resources to help you, and if they need an ice cream machine, you let me know. I'll get them an ice cream machine. Anything!" So I went off. Now, Bill Thomas was very close to Bob in a way that I never could get. Bob had brought this up first with him. And so he sent Bill to the North Slope of Alaska.

JE: Prudhoe Bay, would that have been?

WL: Yeah, Prudhoe Bay. Yeah. He had never fewer than eight rigs running up there. And he says, "I want you to go up there and see what you can do." And he didn't give him any instructions, and he's the senior pastor, you know, the boss. So, Bill went up there and they closed several rigs down that were close enough and brought all the guys together and he preached to them. Well, they all loved it, but Bob realized, "Hey, this is a waste of time. That won't work." But he didn't tell Bill that. He said, "No, I'm going to try and get Wishard, if he can go up there. So, then, he gave me these restrictions. He didn't want any preaching. He didn't want any prayer groups or Sunday schools or anything like that. "I just want you to deal with these people one on one in a week and I want to see what happens." Well, man, that was like chicken feed to starving chickens. I mean, I hit first base with those guys. They were my kind of people. They were a bunch of SOBs and I was, too, and it just worked out beautifully. And I came back after a week. It hit the ground. It was my ministry, it was where I wanted to be. I finally felt like I was where I was supposed to be.

ML: Well, and it lifted Jesus up.

JE: Hmm.

ML: And he had finally learned something about lifting Jesus up.

JE: You were given those three points and you weren't supposed to preach about Jesus?

ML: That's right. I didn't preach! Period.

JE: Or talk? Didn't you feel compelled to want to talk about...

ML: Only insofar as the guys asked me.

JE: Okay.

ML: And they all asked.

WL: Listen. That's the first thing. I had to get acquainted with these guys and one on one. Not formally. I was on the job with a pusher with the drillers and all that all day. Worked with them on the rigs. Went from rig to rig.

JE: When you worked with them, were you helping with the tools?

WL: Oh, no, I didn't do any labor.

ML: He'd just hang out.

WL: Oh, Lord, no.

JE: But you just hung out with them.

WL: He said, "For God's sake, take care of Wish while he's down there, will you?" He said, "He's liable to get kidnapped or something like that."

ML: Wishard was a needy-type person. He would pack and go down to a rig in ah...Peru and he would forget his belt. (Chuckles)

ML: The men on the rig would create him a belt out of ropes or whatever was available and he would wear those ropes to keep his pants up. He knew and they knew that there was a need there and he was needy and they all found something to do to have him.

WL: Two years after I started this, I had a ruptured appendix on that island at Borneo. No hospitals. No nothing. Nobody expected me to survive. They took me to the Union Oil Company—they had a doctor there—he says, "This man's had a ruptured appendix. You've got to get him to Singapore. This was a hot house for germs."

ML: A thousand miles away.

WL: "This is a hot house for germs. If I operated on him, it would kill him." They had two planes there at Balikpapan, a big place in Borneo. One of them had to be fixed so it could carry me, because I was unconscious by this time. They took the seats out and then they sent one of the guys that was a male nurse with me.

ML: I heard that you just commandeered the plane from Union Oil.

WL: That's what Bob—Bob did. Oh, yeah. They just took it over. Later on, the president of Union Oil called from California and said, "What the hell were you doing with a preacher down there in Borneo anyway?" Well, that's what everybody thought, see? He didn't understand.

ML: That officer from Union Oil corresponded with me and told me that there had been eight or so people on the island who had—had surgery. Every single one of them died.

WL: Yeah. They radioed Singapore ahead to the hospital there to have an ambulance at the airport because this was way at night. We didn't leave until 7:00 and it was of midnight before we got to Singapore. Since 6:30 in the morning, I'd been out.

ML: He was unconscious.

WL: We got there and the ambulance wasn't there, so they took me out of the plane on a stretcher and just laid me there. I remember looking up once or twice to see the stars up there. That's all I remember.

ML: You were just lying out there in Singapore where the planes came in.

WL: At midnight. And then the ambulance came and took me—what was the name of the hospital?

ML: Gleneagles Hospital.

WL: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, right. Famous. And “My name is Dr. Lee. I’m going to operate on you. You need not worry. I take care of you. I educated in England. I am a fine doctor. You don’t need to worry.”

ML: Board certified doctor.

WL: Board certified. So then I just passed out and it was four days later before I came to in a big room with other guys, and I was sweating all over the place. Here this big nurse came with a Napoleon hat on and leaned over me and said, “Sir, would your company pay for you for a private room with air-conditioning?” I couldn’t even say yes, but I (laughs) and they moved me in there. Then is when I finally needed everybody. I needed people all the way through. Those darn roughnecks and their families who lived in Singapore came by every day to visit me and they brought their kids with them. A lot of times they didn’t even know what to say, but they stood there with me, you know. And that’s when they realized they had to look out for Wish Lemons.

JE: Hmm.

WL: And that changed the whole direction of my ministry. They were afraid I was going to get kidnapped, number one. Number two, I’d get sick or something like that. So it helped me a whole lot in reaching up. There are two directions if you want to help people. Reach out and reach up. The reaching up was the one that I had learned in the hospital all that time. They were helping me. I wasn’t ministering to them. They were ministering to me.

ML: Reaching down.

WL: And that opened the doors down, not only in Borneo, but all over the planet where we had 130 rigs and most of ’em in 29 different countries. The whole time I worked there.

ML: Well, the concept of reaching down like, “Oh, you poor soul. Let me help you up here where I am,”...

WL: Yeah.

ML: Does not fly.

WL: That’s not the way I reached them. I looked up to them.

ML: Well, you literally did, you had to.

WL: (Indiscernible), one of the famous English men. You probably studied in English literature. He said, “I have never met a person who was not my superior in some way.” But the only way you’re going to find that out is to listen. And so, that’s what I worked on, and I quickly found out that they could do things I couldn’t begin to do.

Chapter 9 - 15:07**On The Riggs**

JE: Some stories—can you tell us a story about one or two of them.

WL: Oh, yeah. You know, in the North Sea between England and Norway, it's the roughest sea in the world. They have an awful time with drilling offshore. But the waves are so huge out there. I was there at one time talking to a bunch of people and this guy came up and said, "Hey, you know, Preacher, I've never been to church unless I was an infant and somebody took me and I didn't know about it." But he said, "I want you to know I was on a rig recently that tilted." He said, "If they tilt more than 33 degrees, we're to abandon ship. This one was bent over and I was up on the top deck 75 feet above the ocean and the waves were coming in over that thing and we were going over." He said, "The thing I want to tell you is, though, I prayed and I was immediately curious." I said, "Well, what did you say? What did you say to the Lord? Did you try to make a deal with Him? Did you say, "If you'll save my life, I'll go to church or I'll tithe or do something like that?" "No, nothing like that, Preacher." He said, "All I wanted was his attention." (Laughs) All I wanted was his attention. He finally had the attention of Almighty God.

JE: How great.

ML: I like that.

WL: And then my favorite story. I landed on this offshore rig in (indiscernible place), rode a helicopter out to the rig and they let me off and introduced me to the tool pusher, who was head of the thing. He said, "Now, Wish, I understand you're a minister and all. Now, you go anywhere you want to, talk to anybody you want to, but there's one man on this rotation that I'd just soon you'd bypass if you possibly can. His name is Beau Bowen. He's an excellent driller, but he killed his wife, is up for manslaughter. He's been relieved of every job he's ever had and I'm thinking about firing him myself."

JE: So he hadn't gone to court for this yet?

WL: No. He said, "I'd just soon you don't see him, because if he finds out you're a preacher, he may insult you. He won't hurt you, but he'll insult you." So I said, "Okay, I won't look for him. Next day I was in the little mess hall, which is about as big as one quarter of this room. A cook over here and a hot table here, and the guys came in and got their food. Nobody else was in there but me and the cook. And all of a sudden, this big tall fellow came in, got his food and then sat turned with his back to me. I thought they may be Beau, so I said, "Is that guy Beau Bowen?" "Yeah." So I went back down and I prayed. People don't think I prayed, but I said, "Lord, I can't leave this place without talking to this guy. He's needy. He's really needy."

ML: He looked like a big bear and he had lots of hair.

WL: Yeah. And so I just opened my mouth and the Lord put the words in there. That's obviously God talking, not me. When I opened my mouth, I said, "Hey, Beau, they've been telling me lies about you. Why your table manners are good!" Now, who in the hell would ever say anything like that? Anyway, he says, "Who you been talking to?" And I said, "Beau, I better introduce myself. I'm a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Old' Bob Parker looked all over the world to find an SOB like me to talk to a SOB like you." He just sat there a minute and all of a sudden he picked his plate up and his tea up and went over and sat across from me and said, "What the hell are you doing here anyhow?" I told him, "Well, I'm here to listen and encourage and help whenever I can." Well, that opened him up and he started finally telling me the whole story of his life. And after he told me about that wife of his, I would have killed her, too.

JE: (Chuckles)

WL: He said, "If you can help me, I've got two kids I've got to take care of. If there's any way you can help me keep my job here, I'm afraid I'm gonna get fired." I said, "I'll do my best." And, boy, I got that pusher off and I talked to him about him and told him my story, and he kept old Beau on and not only did he keep him on, but twelve years later, I was there and they met me at the airport and said, "Old Beau's in the hospital. He fell off the rig and broke his hip and he needs you." I went as fast as I could to the hospital and old Beau was in a big room about this size with people on stretchers and broken bones, you know. He saw me coming in the door and he held his hand up and I went over to him. He reached out and grabbed me and pulled me into his arm and gave me a big bear hug without saying anything. Yeah, kind of crazy, you know, but I prayed for him, and Beau did more for my ministry on the North Slope than Bob Parker or anybody else did. People stopped me in Fairbanks and would say, "Hey, Wish, are you old Beau Bowen's preacher?" And I'd say, "Yep." And it just opened doors. Anybody can get lonely.

JE: But what happened to the charges of him murdering his wife?

WL: Well, that was dismissed or something or other. Apparently, she was unbelievable.

ML: They do follow the law there.

WL: Yeah.

JE: Overall, your ministry on the rigs, while you came in not talking about religion...

WL: Oh yeah, No.

JE: You ended up talking about religion.

WL: That's right. I listened first. I asked questions, leading, about your life, and when did you get to working here.

ML: You ended up talking about religion because they asked you questions.

WL: Yeah. I only talked insofar as answering questions that they asked me, not statements that I would make to them.

ML: John, I think he was living his faith.

WL: Yeah.

ML: Under those rustic, primitive...

WL: Listening, encouraging and helping, you know. A lot of people think that religion is going to church, doing churchy things and all that, when actually the lifestyle of the individual is the important part. And that's listen, encourage and help, so I think that my gospel was Jesus' gospel. That's what He did.

JE: You did this on the rigs for how many years?

WL: Nineteen years.

JE: Nineteen years.

WL: From that first time on.

ML: I remember another illustration that he told me about the young wife in Chad, Africa.

WL: Oh, Lord, yes.

ML: Who lived in a compound with...

WL: Three or four hundred—they were mostly African. And she says, "I'm scared to death. I'm going to have to get out here. I know my husband won't like it. He wants to work here, but I can't take this."

ML: She was packing to go home.

WL: So, I went to the boss's wife and told her about it. She said, "I'll try to take care of that." So she went over there to talk to that girl and calmed her down or else they were going to lose an excellent driller. She said, "We'll be looking out for you and you can always depend on us to help you no matter what."

ML: She didn't have any way to do her laundry. The maids were taking over.

WL: Oh, yeah. And they were taking her stuff and she was scared to death. Well, anybody—three hundred people like that.

ML: She wanted a washing machine of her own so that she could be in charge like she was here in America.

WL: Oh, and I got her a washing machine.

JE: It's hard to tell how many people you introduced to Jesus Christ as a result of that ministry.

WL: That's right. They all knew I was a minister. Of course, every missive that went out from the Tulsa office to all the rigs had a column in it from me. They all knew who Wish Lemons was.

ML: And you dealt in those columns with issues that you had had—being discreet, of course.

WL: I never told stories on them that would get them in trouble or anything like that, but I did have a lot of influence over how they worked and where they worked. And they could tell me things because they knew I was safe. They could tell me things that they didn't like about their location.

ML: You remember the letters that I collected that I have from wives who've never met him and they wrote me letters saying, "All of my husband's life, he's worked and worked and worked. He's never gotten never gotten any recognition or never felt that he was rewarded in any way..."

WL: Or even recognized.

ML: Never recognized until he encountered Wishard on the rig representing Mr. Parker.

JE: Thousands and thousands of lives have been influenced by you.

WL: Right. And it's not because I preached to them. It's because they revealed themselves to me and then I could follow up. And a lot of it was very practical that I could do for them.

ML: And you used to be really good at following up.

WL: Yeah. And even the bosses out there, the head boys, they had problems that they were afraid to bring up for fear they'd get fired.

JE: Bob Parker had no idea when he invited you to do this that week...

WL: That's right. He didn't let me go. He never wanted to let me go. But I got so weak I couldn't get up to those darn rigs. I'd come in on a motor boat in one of those rivers in Africa or something and the rig would be up higher than this building. I had to climb a ladder to get up there.

ML: And you had to have a briefcase.

WL: And I had a briefcase with me. It wasn't easy. The guys would get around up at the top, "Come on, Wish, you can make it! Come on! No way. Come on, you can make it!" (Laughs)

ML: Have you ever climbed on a rope ladder?

WL: I mean when I got on a location, everybody recognized I was there. I ate with them...

ML: Well, you made such an issue.

WL: I ate with them, slept with them for days, you know, several days. Then I went up on the floor of the rigs and talked with them and listened to them.

ML: When he was 76, he came home from a trip and he said, "Wanda, you know, I think I ought to go talk to Bob Parker about how hard it is to get up on those rigs with rope ladders." And Bob said, "Give us one more year."

WL: Yeah, just give us one more year. He said, "You go anywhere you want to, do anything you want, just for a year."

ML: "You choose your itinerary for the next year."

WL: Yeah. Man, I was the only guy that's been hugged by tool pushers all over the planet. (Laughs)

ML: You went to as many locations as you could get to at that time under those circumstances that year.

WL: Oh, yeah.

ML: You traveled the whole year.

WL: But I made 130 rights every year.

JE: Didn't another oil company also...

WL: Oh, yeah, Bill Martin, who was Chairman of the Board of Phillips Petroleum. He and Bob would go down to Mexico and fish. They got to talking one day and Bill says, "You know, I'm going to retire in a couple of years," but he said, "The morale of my troops overseas is pretty bad. I've been watching what you do with Wish." He said, "I wonder if I could borrow him half the time." Bob said, "Well, sure." So they worked a deal out where Phillips paid half my salary and Parker paid half my salary. Quite often I'd come in from Singapore only to be told to go back to Singapore to the Phillips people and other places in the world. Nigeria—all around the world. I visited both Phillips rigs and in the North Sea, I really, you know, when I landed at Stavanger and went to the Phillips office, I said, "I want to go out to the city out there in the middle of the North Sea with a 400-foot hotel and everything. A gym for the guys that go out to the rigs in the North Sea—Ekofisk. I want to go out to Ekofisk. They said, "Well, you can't go out there. They don't allow anybody that's not an employee at Philips that's working in the oil patch." I said, "Well, that's what they send me here for. I don't know what else I'm going to do." So I went back to the hotel in Stavanger. About four o'clock in the morning, the phone rang and this guy said, "Get ready. We're coming to pick you up to take you out to Ekofisk. They'd called Bartlesville and talked to Martin and he told them, "Let that guy do anything he wants to do!" (Chuckles)

ML: You talked about it being a one-on-one, but you had a lot of freedom. Do you remember when we were on the Island of Majorca? They had a little colony of wives and families. The women there begged you to bring Sunday school materials and they helped them set up the Sunday school for their children there on the island. It's Majorca, where the king of Spain has his vacation home.

WL: We had a woman who was head of the shipping of all the rigs...

ML: Yes.

WL: She was like a Margaret Thatcher. That type of person. And I told her what the situation was and she said, "Now, we can't mail that, but I tell you what we'll do. We'll pack that up in a box and put it in the rigs that we're shipping replacements and we'll get it in past the authorities that way." And that's what we did. We mailed them all the stuff they needed.

ML: And that was when you had to tell the officers that you were a consultant. You had to use the term consultant to hide your...

WL: Oh, yeah. Well, like in the Mideast, they wouldn't allow a Protestant preacher in there. I had a separate passport that didn't list me as a minister, but just as a consultant. If they asked me, "Well, what area do you work in?" I'd say, "Personnel." "Oh, okay."

ML: Human Resources.

WL: Yeah. That type thing. But a lot of places wouldn't allow a Christian minister in. Especially Peru.

ML: It's heavily Catholic, too.

WL: Oh, heavily Catholic. Yeah.

JE: Was there any time you were ever challenged on that?

WL: No. No. It worked out all right.

ML: Oh, they covered for him real well.

WL: Oh, yeah.

JE: Thousands and thousands of lives have been touched by you in that in that—in the rig ministry. I don't know what you called it, but the oil rig?

WL: He had six, seven thousand employees at that time. All roughnecks and drillers overseas.

ML: But you did not work directly with the nationals, except where there was overlap.

WL: Like in Somalia—we're hearing a lot about Somalia. They have the tallest people in the world there. The average about seven feet tall. I'd get up on the rig with them. They'd sit down and talk to me between their knees.

(Chuckles)

WL: Squat down, you know, and talk to me. And they'd pat me, you know. They thought I was a priest or something.

JE: How long would you be gone in one span?

WL: Oh, man.

ML: Three weeks?

WL: Yeah. About a month, yeah. I was gone most of the time.

JE: How did you handle that, Wanda?

ML: I had two kids in high school and I worked diligently to get them through high school. When I traveled with him, I would leave the day was out. I would wear to school whatever I wanted to fly in and we'd take off that quickly and then I would have someone care for the kids during the summer.

JE: So all summer long you could be with him?

ML: Yeah. Yeah.

JE: But it was only in the summer, then, that you could join him?

ML: Yeah. Well, spring breaks. I had to work it around my school.

WL: Yeah, I was gone two or three weeks at a time.

ML: You were gone over Thanksgivings.

WL: Yeah.

ML: And the people at the church just took care of the kids for me.

JE: Always home for Christmas?

ML: Yes, you were always home for Christmas, I believe.

WL: Well, everybody in the church knew about my ministry. We called it Ministry to Industry. Bill was very proud of it.

ML: When he was very ill in Singapore and he was gone for a long time, I wanted to be with him.

WL: Oh, yeah.

ML: But Bob Parker was less than discreetly honest with me. He said, "Wanda, he's okay. He's going to be okay. It's not really serious." Well, he was dying!

WL: (Chuckles)

ML: I said, "Well, can I at least contact him on the phone?" "They don't have phones in Gleneagles." Well, that was before computer days. I could have gotten on a computer and found out that they were as modern as we are or more so, but I just went to prayer groups and prayer groups and prayer groups and we prayed and Bob was just protecting Wishard from me as well as the rest of the world at that time.

WL: Now, Singapore is the Shangri-La of planet Earth. It's got everything. It's the most wonderful place in the world to live.

ML: We met friends in Singapore that we didn't know when we went there.

WL: A lot of people lump it with Hong Kong, Jakarta and things like that, and Singapore is no more like Hong Kong or Jakarta than the man in the moon.

Chapter 10 - 11:17

The Lemons Run

JE: Do you have a favorite Bible passage?

WL: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." It's in Philippians.

JE: You've lived to 91.

WL: Mm hmm. I'll be 92 in December.

JE: To what do you give credit for such a long life?

WL: Walking. Exercise. Running. When I could run, I ran. I ran around rigs in Africa and South America. The pushers all thought it was cute I was out there running around because you couldn't get out of the jungle. There's never been a time that I wasn't exercising physically.

JE: But Wanda came along and you enjoyed running.

WL: Yeah, she did.

ML: Yeah. I joined him when I was 50 after the children grew up.

WL: She taught at Oral Roberts.

JE: Wishard, you were the runner...

WL: Yeah.

JE: To begin with and then you actually joined him.

ML: I joined him.

JE: And so you valued exercise early on.

WL: You've got to keep moving—age is the cessation of motion so you can tell just how close you are. You got to keep moving! The whole church knows that's my model. Hey, we've got those old people out there trying to walk.

JE: But you've encourage a lot in your run, the Wish Lemons Run that you've...

WL: That's why they named it after me, because I was a legend in running.

ML: This was the group in our church who were really into missions. When we had our lay witness mission, we did not have any missionaries on the field and the people who came said, "Oh, if this church ever gets involved in missions, watch out." Well, then that happened. One of the groups—the Builders group—wanted to make money and they were tired doing silent auctions and garage sales, and someone in the group said, "Well, why don't we do a run? They're popular. And we could name it after somebody in our church. We could name it after Wishard Lemons for instance." So the class took that and ran with it. And it was a secret. I knew it about six months before you did. (Chuckles)

WL: When we came to Tulsa, Charlie Thornton, who was chairman of Reading & Bates, gave us both—Bill and I—memberships in the YMCA.

ML: Well, he was building the Thornton YMCA at that time.

WL: Yeah, Thornton YMCA. I got all the preachers involved.

ML: Except Joseph. He says he's going to run this year.

WL: Yeah. He weighs about 350.

ML: We have special shirts made for him that he could fit into.

WL: (Chuckles)

ML: He's lost about 75 pounds.

JE: That's right.

ML: He says he's gonna run.

WL: He's probably one of the best baritones in the United States.

ML: Well, John knows him. John used to narrate from our pulpit, remember?

WL: Oh, that's right.

JE: Yeah. Joseph Bias?

WL: Mm hmm.

JE: Yeah. I saw him last Sunday. He's lost a weight.

WL: It would take a lot of weight to lose before it would begin to be noticeable.

ML: Well, it's noticeable now.

JE: It is now.

ML: It's noticeable now.

JE: I'm telling you. He sang the song, "The Love of God" again and you forget what power that voice has. He got a standing ovation.

WL: Yeah.

ML: He does.

JE: It was just beautiful.

ML: He's something else. He has a beautiful ministry. But you know, Don (indiscernible) was more of a people ministry like you.

WL: Yeah, Don and I worked together.

ML: But Joseph has a special ministry and it usually relates to music.

JE: Right.

WL: Well, yeah.

JE: How would you like to be remembered?

WL: You got to keep moving.

JE: Is there a favorite hymns or gospel songs that you've enjoyed the most?

WL: Oh, yeah. "Are You Able?"

ML: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness".

WL: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" and "Are You Able?"

ML: "Trust and Obey".

WL: Mm hmm. And "When We All Get To Heaven (singing), how great and glorious that will be. When we all see Jesus, we'll...

ML: "Sing and shout the victory."

WL: I have no memory.

ML: Wishard's dad had all the musical ability and, unfortunately, those times were hard.

WL: I don't have any musical ability.

ML: Well, you would have had, had you been trained at the right time.

WL: I had a real good voice, but it's gradually fading out on me.

ML: Wishard, you didn't tell John about your burial at sea.

JE: Burial at sea?

WL: This guy came from one of the big companies, said, "Wish, I understand you travel the world to all these rigs," said, "My uncle," or somebody, "wanted to be buried at sea and I can't get anybody to do it, and I wondered if you could take his ashes with you on your next trip and when you're at sea, just kind of back up to the rail and drop them over the side and don't get any attention about it or anything." I said, "Well, yeah, I'll do it." It was a little thing about that big.

ML: An urn.

WL: Yeah. I got out there and the captain of the ship and I got acquainted real quick. I mean...

ML: It was an Italian oil tanker.

WL: Angelo Tumiaski. He'd had all kind of weird adventures he loved to tell me, and I ate with him three times a day. We went across the gulf to a place over there and unloaded. Finally, I realized I had to do something with these ashes. There were only about four people on the ship that talked English. The rest of them were Italians. His father and grandfather had been sea captains. I told him that I had these ashes and that I wondered if I could just drop them over the side. He said, "We'll do better than that, by George. We'll do a ceremony. They can't understand you but they'll know what you're doing because I'll tell them. We'll make a circle over a certain point where we drop them off and then I'll give you a certificate, a burial at sea, to take back to that fellow." And you know what? I stood up there and shook hands with all these guys if they could get away from duties, and I preached a sermon. Only a few of them ever understood a word I said.

ML: But they knew the spirit in what you were doing.

WL: But they knew what I was doing. And he actually did a course, 360-degrees, that tanker loaded with oil. I don't know what the company would ever think about something like that.

ML: Well, he was the captain and he made the decision.

WL: Oh, yeah. He was boss. He could do anything he wanted.

ML: It was a real beautiful ceremony.

WL: They gave me a little cabin with a refrigerator in it. It was loaded with beer and liquor.

ML: You were treated like a celebrity.

WL: Oh, man, they treated me like a king. And I ate two times, usually at the big meals, I'd eat with the officers and then go downstairs and eat with the men.

ML: Also, you haven't talked much about your baptismal service where you baptized 3,000 people.

WL: Oh, well, yeah. Sumatra. We had a Methodist bishop down there and they were going to have a big baptismal, and we had to drive from the main seaport out into the jungle to it. There must have been two or three thousand people there and many of them had been talked to by the minister who was over them and talked their language, and they were ready to be baptized.

ML: They had walked for days to get to the center point.

WL: Yeah, to get there. We didn't do it in a building. It was all outside. It was so many people. He had about 40 ministers. We all had a cloth and things. . .

ML: You were all trained.

WL: To wipe the dishes that they drank out of. Had that evangelist and I can't think of his name, but the Methodist evangelist worldwide. He preached to them in their language and then we just went to (indiscernible). And for the first time, baptism became significant to me in a real way. Things happened out there as we were baptizing these people! It was awesome! I never baptized that many people in my whole life.

ML: You wore the little sarong..

WL: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

ML: With the chords.

WL: So they knew who I was, you know.

ML: And he was twice as big as anybody.

WL: Oh, yeah.

JE: So each one you baptized?

WL: Three thousand people that day.

JE: All day long?

WL: All day long. All day long.

JE: Obviously, it's very emotional. You teared up now talking about that, to think that all those lives.

ML: There were 40 ministers and I could see a lea, a big flat...

WL: Oh, and the pigs and dogs ran between our legs...

ML: Animals. Animals.

WL: And all that was going on all the time.

ML: You just stood there and the people just kind of swarmed around you until he could reach them.

WL: And, oh, they brought with them little pieces of paper to prove that they were ready for baptism by their minister. Had his name on it.

ML: And they'd take that back to their local village with Wishard's initials on it or signature or whatever.

JE: So God used you, but then he had also used all these...

WL: All these other people.

JE: Ministers out there.

WL: And it made a difference in those people, you know. I've had a lot of baptisms where these people just baptize and that's all there is to it. But this thing was emotional. Yeah.

ML: I remember you were very moved with that experience.

JE: You're going to see a lot of these people in Heaven, aren't you?

WL: Oh, boy. Wooh! Yeah. Yeah.

ML: We were in Nairobi on a trip. Everywhere we went, we were asked about...

WL: Osborn. T. L. Osborn.

ML: T. L. Osborn.

WL: Hey, man, that guy brought more people to Christ than anybody else in the world. In Africa, he had thousands. You know where all this growth of Christianity is in Africa and South America? He's mainly responsible for that.

ML: He only ministers there. He doesn't minister here.

WL: In the United States.

ML: Those people think he's God. We were sitting on a bench waiting for a plane to come and we were swarmed with people who saw we were of the white face to say, "You're from the U.S.A.? Do you know T. L. Osborn?"

WL: Oh, yeah.

ML: We were asked that many, many times while we were in Africa.

WL: And he had healing services.

ML: When we came home...

WL: He did all three. Preach, teach and heal.

ML: When we came home, we got in our car and we went to World Evangelism.

WL: And he brought these artifacts back from overseas and so the big boys decided he wasn't paying taxes on it or something or other, so they brought up a case against him. Warren Holgren and I went down...

ML: You and Warren both went down to testify for him.

WL: We gave them hell. Leave that guy alone. Those things—he's just giving them away. It's just a part of his ministry.

ML: T. L. and Daisy.

WL: Yeah, T. L. and Daisy.

JE: Now that building's being moved for the highway.

ML: Yes, it is.

JE: Your sermons. Do you write them out ahead of time?

WL: Oh, yeah. I don't ad lib anything.

JE: But, then, you don't read them, do you, from the pulpit?

WL: I read them with such power and stuff, it's not...

JE: It doesn't appear.

ML: He's not a verbatim preacher, so he won't get into tributaries and be one of these long-winded, never-ending preachers. He has a limit.

WL: People would stop me on the streets of Fairbanks and say, "Are you the preacher Old Beau likes?" Beau opened doors for me no one else could. I complimented his table manners. Isn't that what Almighty God did when He wanted to communicate with and influence you and me? He didn't communicate with human beings by a show of strength or power, which He could have easily done. He came as the most helpless being on the face of the earth, a human infant. He gave His attention, He lifted His wee arms to us. He needed us. He appreciated us, telling us that we were a total being created in the image of Almighty God and destined for life eternal. He finally lifted His arms up on the cross. Just think! You had the attention and appreciation of Almighty God that you go about your service to humanity. Remember, the greatest gift you can give anybody is your attention. Second, if you really want to influence the behavior of anyone, find a way to look up to them, to appreciate them.

JE: Amen.

WL: Amen.

JE: Thank you so much, both of you.

Chapter 11 - 00.29

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers and librarians are using this website for research, and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience. Thank you for your support as we preserve Oklahoma's legacy one voice at a time on VoicesofOklahoma.com.