

Beth and I are honored to share our lives with you. The Lord Jesus has made us the two richest people on the planet and we are constantly grateful to Him.



We are passionately in love with the Lord, with each other, with our son and daughter and with our Liberty family. In this biography we will share:

- 1. Childhood Events that helped to shape each of us.**
- 2. How we came each to Jesus.**
- 3. How we met, dated and married.**
- 4. About our family.**
- 5. About the starting of Liberty Church.**
- 6. About the season of becoming multi-cultural**
- 7. About the identity issue of staying “Small Church”**

**1. Childhood Events that helped to shape each of us.**

## **John**

My Childhood was shaped by three main influences.

### **1. My Family**

I am the third child and oldest son of six kids. All of my siblings and both of my Parents are all passionate Christians. I was the first one to become a Christian when I was 19 years old. It was a fascinating season to watch my Parents and all of my siblings give their lives to Christ over the next few years.

My Parents have an amazing marriage. They have been married since 1954 and have a very loving marriage. All of my siblings have wonderful marriages and a lot of the credit for our terrific marriages goes to my Parents example.

### **2. A Horrible Season of Persecution**

I was born in Pittsburgh PA in 1957. In 1965 my family moved to Philadelphia PA. Those seven years in Philly were very hard on me. I was a skinny, awkward young man with glasses in a rough area of town. I was picked on daily and rarely went a month without some type of physical abuse at school ranging from being spit upon to being knocked down and kicked. I was terrified all of the time and did not have any friends.

### **2. A Shocking Season of Success**

In 1972 my family moved to Marietta GA. I was entering the tenth grade and began to attend Wheeler High School. Wheeler was much larger than my old school in Philly. My school in Philly only had about 150 in my class, while Wheeler had 770 students in my graduating class.

To my shock, no one beat me up when I came to Wheeler. Wheeler was dominated by “Born Again” Christians. I had never heard of a “Born Again” Christian. I hardly knew anyone who even went to church in Philly.

At Wheeler I experienced a remarkable turn around. I began to excel in every area.

By the time I graduated three years later I had:

- Been Voted Most Likely to Succeed
- Been State President of the National Honor Society
- Had won seven different Wrestling titles
- Had been voted Mr. Senior Class
- Graduated 11<sup>th</sup> academically out of over 700 students
- Was popular and very happy.

I was NOT a Christian and did not become a Christian until after my junior year

of College. However, these two extremes of living helped to shape my understanding of my need for Christ.

## **Beth**

My Childhood was shaped by two main influences.

### **1. A Very Happy Childhood**

I had two very wonderful Parents and a terrific older brother. My family was very faithful in the Lutheran church and my Parents lived their faith out every day of their lives.

I was born in Seattle Washington in 1964. We moved to San Jose California when I was one year old, to New Jersey when I was seven years old and to Marietta GA when I was ten years old. I enjoyed each place I lived.

### **2. My Mom's Accident and Surgeries**

A month before my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday, my mom fell down a set of stairs while I and my brother were at school. This fall combined with my mom's medical condition of syringomyelia combined with a number of surgeries that followed the accident, left my Mom mostly paralyzed from the shoulders down.

My Mom lived for fifteen more years and the way she and my Dad handled that time has a lot to do with who I am today. My Parents NEVER complained. They lived each day in great thankfulness, joy, peace, calmness and love.

My Dad personally and loving took care of all my Mom's physical needs while working a full time job and taking care of my brother and myself.

In some ways, my Mom's accident made us closer. My mom was my best friend. We would sit and talk for hours. My mom was always excited about what was happening in my life and was my biggest cheerleader. I still miss my mom to this day.

## **2. How we came each to Jesus.**

### **John**

I fought against Christianity. After experiencing such success in high school, I was greatly irritated by the message of Christianity that I am a sinner and need forgiveness for my sins. I began to persecute and debate against Christians.

Over those two years, the Lord was kind enough to show me how empty my life was without him. I had seen the best of this world and the worst of this world and they were both empty.

In July 1977, I went with a friend to a home Bible Study because they were the most passionate Christians I had ever met. If I was going to give my life to Jesus, I did not want to hold anything back. This small group Bible Study was part of Mt. Paran Church of God. I went with the group to Mt. Paran and gave my life to Jesus. I gave him ALL of my heart and have been ALIVE with passion for him every day of my life since that day.

### **Beth**

My coming to Christ was a bit softer than the way that John came to Christ. ☺

I truly believed and received Jesus as my Savior and Lord as a young child in the Lutheran Church.

At Walton High School, in the ninth grade, I began to be friends with John's younger sister Julia Fichtner. Julia and I joined a choir at a small new church called Covenant Chapel that was a church plant of Mt. Paran Church of God. At Covenant Chapel, there was a strong youth group and choir. In that atmosphere, my love for Jesus grew greatly.

### **3 . How we met, dated and married.**

As you have already read, we met through John's sister Julia. I (John) was at college at Auburn during most of the time when Beth was getting involved in Covenant Chapel. I would come home on the weekend to find this cute little blonde who was my sister's best friend and practically another member of the family. Beth was over at our house constantly.

We dated a little bit in Beth's Junior year of High School, but only for a few months.

When Beth finished High School, I had graduated from Bible College and was working in the ministry in Birmingham Al. Beth wound up going to Samford University in Birmingham for her nursing degree. She attended church where I was on staff and we resumed a friendship.

We wound up dating for almost three years and were married in March 1984.

### **4. About our family.**

In 1987 our son John David was born. He is graduating with honors this year from Lee University in Tennessee. He has been accepted in the University of Georgia Law

School. He has also been accepted into the Marine JAG program. After he graduates from Law School, he will serve our country as a Marine.

In 1989 our son Stephen Richard was born but sadly he was stillborn. He helps us to long for heaven to see our second son. The Lord gave us great peace and the very loving support of our church family during that painful time.

In 1990 our daughter Gemma was born. Gemma is graduating with honors this year from North Cobb Christian School. She has been accepted into Kennesaw State University. She plans on becoming a nurse.

## **5. About the starting of Liberty Church.**

Twice in Bible College the Lord spoke to me that my lifetime calling was to Pastor a church in Marietta. When I first came on staff in Birmingham, the Lord spoke to me that I would be on staff for five years. Five years later exactly, the church in Birmingham, sent me out as a missionary to Marietta. They gave me nine months of income and their complete blessing!

We rented a Lutheran Church on Sunday nights in East Marietta before we moved into the Strand Theater on the square in Marietta for seven years.

From the beginning, our vision for Liberty has been the same. We hunger for Liberty Church to be a place of great love, safety, warmth, close friendships and high excellence.

For the first five years of the church, we lived in a small garage apartment and Beth worked full time as a nurse, while John worked full time at the church for free. ☺ After about five years the church was able to pay John a salary.

As we mentioned in the story of the entire church, in 1993 the church was able to purchase the property where we currently house all seven churches. This property was an old Wicks Lumber building. We were able to purchase the property in a bankruptcy hearing for approx. one fourth of the value of the property.

## **6. About the season of becoming multi-cultural**

In the middle 1990s I came to the place where I could no longer abide the separation of races within the church. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been one of my heroes since I was a child.

I had always wanted our church to be multi-cultural, but had not put forth the effort and energy required to build the bridges across different races and cultures.

I began to ask our leaders to read books and to study this issue. I did underestimate how much resistance I would receive to teaching a vision of a multi-cultural church. As we moved intentionally toward being more multi-cultural, we had many hundreds of people leave the church. We released them, blessed them and the Lord was merciful to us in that He sent us many more people who are passionate to see many races worshipping Jesus together.

Today our seven churches have a beautiful mix of many races and cultures that is very evenly balanced and allows all peoples to be comfortable and welcomed at Liberty.

## **7. About the identity issue of staying “Small Church”**

In the later 1990s, our church began to grow so fast that we were losing our strength of close family relationships.

The process of becoming Seven “Related” churches which share the same building and the same Senior Pastor has gone extremely smooth. It is hard to imagine so much fun, energy, sense of community and family until you have actually seen a Liberty Church.

We consider ourselves the two richest people on the planet. Between our love for Jesus, our marriage, our kids and our amazing Liberty Church families, our cup of blessings overflows beyond our highest hopes.

It is my honor to personally build a friendship with each person who joins one of the Liberty Churches.