

DEBBIE WHIPPLE, INTERVIEW, 2004

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When did you become a Christian, get called to preach?

I'm originally from Kansas City. I came to Oklahoma in my early 30. I was born and raised there. I'm from an Italian Catholic background. I got really and truly saved when I was twenty-five years old. Up until that time I was in a Catholic church and went to Catholic schools. As far as the call—it was probably after I had my two children that I really – I was divorced at the time—and I really sensed the Lord leading me to go to school—to go to Bible college. I didn't really know I was called to preach per se, but looking back I think I've been called since I was a young child because I did strange things that kids don't normally do. I remember, just in the middle of the day, I would always go into church, the Catholic church, all by myself—and I couldn't have been more than eight or nine years old—and go up to the front of the church to the altar and I would kneel down and pray and talk to God. Looking back, that's strange. Not a lot of kids do that. But that was just normal to me. I just wanted to do that. I just liked being there.

There were three or four specific things I would pray for all the time. We had to go to mass every day at Catholic school. I remember one day doing that, and I couldn't have been more than ten years old, and of course the priests were always men and they still are today, but I remember watching them serve Communion and although I didn't realized it then it was God talking to me and what he said to me was: "You're going to do that someday." And not even understanding what was happening, I just looked up at the priest and I thought, "Okay I'm going to do that someday." But there's no way I could have done that in the Catholic church. I think now lay people do serve communion, but you're talking about thirty-seven years ago and I felt

like that's what I was being told in my spirit. So looking back, I think now that was all very strange.

I was in the Catholic church until I was twenty-five years old but in the Catholic church back then I couldn't take communion anymore if you were divorced. That was a very hard, hard thing for me because I had such experiences with God as a young child. I made my first communion and that's a big deal in the Catholic church. I remember like weeks before my first communion I had a dream. I was kind of flying and there was a Eucharist, we called it "hosts" back then, and in this dream I was flying around and I was picking all these wafers off this tree. So getting ready to make my first holy communion was a big deal and so I was all into that.

Then the day I made it, we always made a big to-do about that kind of stuff in the Catholic church and my family had a big party. Whenever anybody made their first holy communion, we had a big party. So it was my party and my day.

So, I remember playing around in the backyard telling my older cousins that I feel something inside; I feel so different inside. They looked at me like I was crazy. And that was it.

And so looking back on all these little things, I was having a walk with God that I didn't even know I was having. Now when I probably had my first truly repentive experience, I was again in the Catholic church; it was on a Good Friday. They would have the stations of the cross. The stations of the cross are the twelve stations or stops Christ made from the time he went before Pilate to the time he was crucified. And what would happen is that the priest would walk you through the station, and on the wall they have icons at each station. You walk and he explains what's going on.

When we go to the station where he fell under the weight of the cross, where Simon had to help him pick it up, I remember feeling the weight of my sin and I remember falling down

crying and the nuns just walked on around me. They don't lead you in a salvation experience in the Catholic church. There's never a real born again experience. You know Christ died for your sins. You know Jesus took away the sins of the world. You know all this stuff. But you don't every really make that confession. You make it in every mass service you make it, you say the Catholic creed, you say Christ died for my sins to take away the sins of the world.

I remember crying and crying and feeling the weight of my sin and actually saying, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." The nuns and other people just walked around me and went on with the rest of the stations and I composed myself and went on. Now I look back I realized that was my first truly repentive experience with the Lord.

I went on with my life and got married the first time in the Catholic church. We divorced and I had my time away from God. It was a really sinful time n my life. I didn't know a thing about Pentecost. I never set foot in another church. I was raised that you never went to another church. It was almost a sin to step foot outside a Catholic church. One time I went with a Methodist friend of mine, but outside of that I had never set foot in another church. Didn't know anything about it.

So I was living in a house in Kansas City and we had divorced and I realized what a sinner I was and had been for the last three or four years. And I began telling God that "I was sorry, I was sorry, please forgive me." And the next thing I knew, I fell—bam!—fell flat. I remember thinking that I didn't feel myself hitting the floor. And I was babbling something. Didn't know what on earth—My mind was telling me that God was casting me down because I was such a sinner—so I got up and went on with my way.

I had a cousin who had married a girl who was Assembly of God and he and I were really close. And they came over one day and I told them what had happened. And he said, "I want you

to come to church with me.” And from that day I went and that was the beginning of my salvation experience.

So, what I find really different about my life is that all of that happened to me when I didn’t know anything about it. I never saw anybody—I didn’t even know people were slain in the spirit, I didn’t know what it was and it happened and I remember that it didn’t hurt. I remember, all this stuff went through my mind—I fell and it didn’t hurt. And I was babbling something, so I assume I got the baptism and was filled with the spirit all at the same time. So, everything kind of fell n place after that. That was my initial experience. I was twenty-five. Then I got remarried, had my two kids, then I got divorced again.

It was to be my second divorce. Then I moved to Oklahoma. My brothers moved here, my parents moved here, I moved here, my husband left me here. He was a non-Christian.

So, that’s when God really, really called me to preach. Well, actually the calling was: “Study to prove thyself worthy.” I was reading my Bible and that was the calling, So, I didn’t really know what I was doing. In school, when I was in junior high, looking back again I was very...I was the nerd of the school, didn’t have a lot of friends, and no dates and all that business. But in speech class, for some reason—and again, it was the calling—I delivered a speech. In the whole time I was there, I delivered one speech. And, it was such a moving speech that I ended up doing it for the whole school and they tape-recorded it.

So you knew you had a gift?

I didn’t even know it really. I knew I enjoyed it. And the techniques I learned in speech class I still use in my sermons today. And they make it very easy for me. For some reason, that class just stuck. It was easy; I understood it; I enjoyed researching it. I enjoyed putting it all

together and I still use that method today. I try to get away from it and do something different, and I just can't. So that calling was always there. I didn't always know what was happening.

So, then I went to Southwestern. When I got out of college, I got my license. And after that I got ordained.

Where did you preach?

All over. Yesterday I preach at Church of the Servant. The United Methodist Church. I did their women's Bible study. There is no rhyme or reason to it. I've been to the Semor-Johnson Air Force base, the Family Air Force retreat, I do women's retreats, I speak in churches—

It doesn't matter the denomination?

Apparently not (laughter). I just go wherever the door opens.

I work in evangelism and I do prayer walks. I am the Prayer Walk Coordinator for Evangelism USA. Which, I go to the church plants and I do a Prayer Walk for them. It is an all day Saturday thing with a Friday night service. I am the World Intercession Network Conference Director for the Home Missions Conference. So, there's really no rhyme or reason to what I do. I've been asked to speak in Guyana, South America and that's the first time I've been asked to speak out of the country. That is October 11th through the 19th.

Do these invitations just come or do you seek them out?

I never seek out an invitation.

What sets a PH preacher apart is that his/her sermons come from the heart. What do you do to prepare? What do you do first when you get an invitation?

First, I say oh God, what do you want me to say! (laughs) I notice that I have gone from what am I going to do to show me what you want and I'm going to trust that you're going to give it to me. So it has been a turn of faith for me. From that little ritual—what am I going to do to:

Okay, what do you want me to say. I know there's something and I'm just going to believe that you're going to give it to me.

And I pretty much don't start with paper and pen until I get something and then I might jot it down and I'll have notes everywhere because I have an eight to five job I can't give total focus to that message. So it's in the car, doing the dishes, fixing the bed, at night, first thing in the morning, at work I'll jot something down that is in my head. And after a few days, I kind of get an outline, and pray and talk to God and I pretty much have to have an ongoing conversation with God all the time. So, that's how it all comes together and then I do manuscripts. I'm a manuscript kind of preacher. I'll write out every word, every joke, every emotion, and I take the yellow highlighter and I go down the manuscript and I highlight all of the important things that need to come out. I've tried to go back and do an outline but I'm just not comfortable because for me the anointing comes in the preparation. As I prepare, I really sense the spirit of God and the anointing of God. And so I'm writing down every word that I hear him say. And then I pretty much memorize it, go with the flow and preach it. I definitely listen to the voice. If he says something while I'm talking about it, then I say it.

Do you use stock sermons or are all of them inspired and original?

I do not, but I definitely see the benefit in that for a preacher who has to preach several times a week. However, I do use some things that God has shown me over and over. For example, as my kids have been leaving the home it has been very, very difficult. And they have been drawn to my other family members-my brothers and sisters and their families. They live different life styles than we live, have more money than we have, and when I was talking to my mom on the phone about them she said, "Now we shouldn't be jealous over the stuff other people have." And when I hung up, I thought, I'm not jealous of the stuff that they have. I'm

jealous of the influence that they are having over my children, And just like a light bulb, I realized: that's what the jealousy of God is. I never understood it when I read that God is a jealous God. What do I have that God could be jealous of? He's not jealous of any thing that we have—he's jealous of the influence those things have over us. So, if they have more influence over us than he does that's what he's jealous of. Just like I was jealous of the influence other people were having over my children, that's how God is with his children. Whenever we let something influence us more than him—if I think if I act a certain way what is so and so going to say about it? And that's more important to him—that's what he's jealous of.

How do you fit into the history of the IPHC?

I went to Southwestern because that's where God led me. It could have been anything under the sun and it wouldn't have mattered because God called me. I was saved in an Assembly of God church. I went to the Bible college. I remember at the time that the PH college did not license or ordain divorced people. But I can remember walking on the college thinking—Lord, I know you called me and if I never have a credential I know I'm a minister. Through circumstances I was drawn to the church and Muse memorial and then I got the job and as soon as I went it was at that General Conference that they decided that if you were divorced you could be ordained.

So, I say that to say that I didn't care where I was because I knew that God had led me there. I mean, I know little bits and pieces—they started in Falcon—but it didn't matter. It was where God said to go. Which likewise when things come up that are not scriptural, then it helps me not to run off. I don't leave because I don't agree with something that somebody said.

Are there any kinds of challenges that you have faced because you're a woman preacher?

There was a time when my husband used to tell me—stay at your job because God is going to open up something there. And I remember I was on the steps to the Bishop's office and I thought, no, nothing's going to happen to me because the men won't let it happen to me. And just when I got to the top step, God asked me: "Am I not bigger than the men in this building?" And I had to stop. My answer was not immediate because I didn't know. I knew he was bigger. I didn't know if he would do it, I knew he had enough power to do it, but I didn't know. Then I thought of course you're bigger. So, at that point things changed and doors started to open. So, I really haven't had obstacles in that way.

I've learned that when you keep your place and be still that God opens doors and when he does usually I have men pushing me forward, pushing me to get out there. I just had an elder in my old church come up to me and tell me that you really need to get your ministry solidified; you really need to get your non-profit status. And it was like when he told me, I was hearing God tell me. It's time. Do it. So, I've found that men are opening doors for me. I don't ever have to open a door for myself. Things may not move as quickly in my life as far as ministry goes, but I feel like the things I am doing have a lot of impact.

I don't have a lot of steps but I have huge steps. I was the first secretary woman to be asked to speak at a conference two years ago. And about two weeks before I was asked to speak, the Lord told me to get my notes in really good order and I did. About two weeks later my boss asked me to be a speaker and I said I did because God told me to do it. So it was ready.

So I may go six months without a speaking engagement but then there may be something really significant in the kingdom of God kind of thing. So, I'm not in a normal church preaching every week. That's not the route God has called me to. Now, that's the normal route you think you're supposed to go.

Do you see the fruit of your ministry?

They're so geographically spread out. I don't see it, but I hear about it. I'll get word back. I know it's fruitful. I don't ever doubt about having an impact. I see it on the spot, also.

Do you mentor any women that want to be preachers?

I have several people that I mentor at some level, but not anyone that wants to be a preacher. I have people that mentor me. That's the level I'm at.