

Rita Wrenn

How long were you affiliated with the IPHC?

All my life. I attended a PH Church for nine months before I was born and every time the church doors were opened afterwards, unless providentially hindered.

Were your parents involved with the denomination?

Yes, emphatically yet!

And how were they involved? Were they members of the church?

Yes, as a matter-of-fact, Dad built the church at Greeleyville, SC. After he and my brother, Theron Floyd, built a store for my mother and sister to supplement his income as a farmer, they then built our home. Next to that they built the church, all side by side.

And he pastured there?

No. He never considered himself a preacher. He was never licensed. But he was a "lay preacher". He would go around and speak in churches, especially in black churches in Williamsburg County SC. He was very popular with them. There is a sense in which he did preach although he never claimed to be one. He was one who could see something Biblical in everyday things: object lessons. So he was always relating everyday things to God and His Word. He was always a teacher.

How old were you when you were saved?

Twelve. But it was at seventeen that I really dedicated my life to Christ, surrendered all!

And how old were you when you were called to preach?

Around 24. There was a night in a revival at our church. A man came to visit who would get up to play guitar and sing. I am the type that usually appreciates a person doing the best they can with what they have, but this man, in my opinion, just didn't have it! I didn't think much of his ability to play nor sing. During the altar service I was praying, feeling I was really getting in touch with God when this man walks around, gets directly in front of me, I could have reached out and touched the toe of his shoe, strums his guitar and I knew he was going to "sing". I was annoyed because I thought he would be a distraction to my praying. He started singing, "Go Ye And Feed My Sheep!" The Holy Spirit got into it and it was as if he was transformed in Jesus Himself. His music and singing were beautiful!!! Jesus was singing/asking me if I'd go feed His sheep. I just melted to the floor and told the Lord I'd be honored and happy to feed His sheep.

And then did you go study and get your license? Or did you just start preaching.

My husband received his call to preach at about the same time. He felt God calling him to Holmes College of the Bible so, of course, that's where we went. He got his license but I didn't. I have always been invited to speak various places and I've never said no, it didn't matter where it was. At Holmes we felt I should work so my husband could devote his full time to studies so I just signed up for every special class available that time would permit me to attend. One of the most beneficial things there was when I was asked to transcribe the Bible classes. I couldn't be in the classes but having to listen and type what was said really nailed it down for me! I thank God for that! It wasn't until I started working at headquarters of the SCPHC in Lake City, around ten years later that I got what was called "Mission Workers" license (now called Lay Ministers License)

Did you get ordained after that?

No, I'm still not ordained. But the Lord may help me do it yet. It's never too late!

What was your first experience like when you were baptized in the Holy Spirit?

The major change it made in my life was that I immediately became more aware of God talking to me. His Word became personified! It was amazing, delightful, and directive that He would speak to me constantly. To my knowledge, this was not the case in the earlier experiences. After the Holy Spirit baptism I felt it stabilized me. It established me! Even though I've had my ups and downs He has been my Paraclete, One Who clings, One Who walks beside and participates in every facet of life! I realize we receive the Holy Spirit in a measure when we're saved, in a greater measure in sanctification, but when the Holy Spirit baptized us, He FILLS us up to the brim. Life will always have its ups and downs but when HE indwells a person, there's no more "strong one day, floundering the next." He becomes a constant companion.

And how has that impacted your preaching?

How could one ever preach without Him? In my case, He didn't call me until He had first filled me with His Spirit. He tells me what to preach, then when it goes the way it should, HE does the preaching. He uses my mouth, my voice, but He's the One doing the talking! The most outstanding experience I had with that, I was a part of an evangelistic team that went to Russia. There was one of the services there when the Spirit took such possession of me that it was frightening. At least to my flesh it was frightening. In the Spirit it was the most delightful experience ever! I was so NOT in control! I was actually listening to my own words. It has happened that way since. I wish it ALWAYS worked that way.

How do you get your messages?

He speaks a thought to me that just seems to "press in", won't leave. It may be something the preacher said, a song on the radio, but nine out of ten times it will be something that comes to me in the night. I've learned that when I'm awakened to a thought or song at 3 a.m. God usually has someone He wants me to take that message to. The call usually comes in soon after the night vision.

You say your husband is a pastor. Did you share the pulpit?

My husband is retired now but no, not consistently. When he felt that "nudge" that God had given me the message, he would ask me to preach and not take no for an answer. After he retired and was serving as interim pastor, he asked me more often then. He probably asked me to preach two out of every three occasions.

How would you characterize your preaching style?

I'm a story teller. I think I may have inherited my Dad's gift for seeing object lessons in things around me. When I went to speak for the Alabama PHC WM, Jewelle Stewart was director. She introduced me as "one who speaks in parables." I think that's it! I'm not a fireball like the one coming to preach Thursday and Friday night of annual Camp Meeting. I love her and I LOVE her style. I'm glad God gave it to her! I am extremely proud of her. But I'm happy with the style He gave me. I love it, too!

As you look back is there a particular service that stands out?

Yes, I eluded to it earlier, an experience in Russia. I'm glad to further elaborate. The reason this stands out is because of the background. Sometime during the years I worked at the SCPHC headquarters in Lake City, (1975-1982) a coworker, Hazel Hancock, prophesied to me more than once saying one day I would help take the Gospel to Russia. She saw me in a vision standing on the streets there handing out Bibles. (Remember they were still under communism at that time) We figured out it was seventeen and one half years later that it happened. I had actually forgotten the prophecy. It seems so impossible to me that I dismissed it from my thoughts. One day my sister in law, Lorraine Floyd, came and asked if I'd join a team going there. As soon as she said the word, "Russia" the Holy Spirit quickened my memory to what Hazel had said and I knew I was supposed to go. In Hazel's prophesies she would say, "You'll see God do something so phenomenal you won't believe it though you see it with your own eyes." Then the night before we were to fly out the next day a black prophet who did not know me, spoke those same words, almost verbatim. This black prophet also told us what we would encounter and what God would do. It was as if he mapped out our steps. He said God would send us to a place where there were two demonic strongholds, Gog and Magog, but God would bring them down, never to rise again in that place. He saw in the Spirit how we had tried to get three preachers to go, men, but God would not let them go at this time. He said, "God wants to use women!" So it was in this place at this time that God did something unbelievably phenomenal!

We had been instructed not to preach doctrine because these people had been without the Gospel for at least two generations so we were to be really basic, Billy Graham style, they called it, just preach salvation. That's what we intended to do. But on this night, when I stood up, the Holy Spirit took control. He preached that they needed the indwelling of the Holy Spirit if they were to understand the printed Word we had brought them. He is the Teacher and without Him one cannot know and understand the Word. I'm thinking, "Hey, Lord, aren't You getting a little ahead of yourself? Are these people even saved yet?" But I also knew the Holy Ghost knew what to say. The ladies sitting on the

platform behind me said it was such an amazing thing: I was supposed to say a sentence, stop to give the interpreter time, but I got so caught up in the Spirit that I forgot about the interpreter. My mouth was going full throttle and so was his. The semi-circle platform jutted out into the audience. I was looking this way, the interpreter that way. Our backs were to each other. The ladies said they knew the interpreter was saying the same thing I was although they couldn't speak his language. Every body gesture I made, they said he made the identical same gesture. If I lifted my hand, so did he. If I kicked one foot, so did he. If I waved my Bible, so did he and we were not looking at each other.

At some point I was intending to ask who would like to have this "Third Person of the Godhead" indwell them, but before I could ask, everybody in the building came to their feet and a roar went up from them. Momentarily it frightened me until I saw their faces. They were glowing like angels, with joy and singing. We had never seen anything like it! Everybody in the building had locked arms, were swaying as if there was an invisible connection binding them together, people in the main section, under the balcony, in the balcony, in the stairways leading up to the balcony, standing around the walls, all swaying and singing in absolute unison! I turned to the interpreter and asked what they were saying. He said, "I have no idea!" I said, "Then they're not speaking in Russian, right?" He said, "That's right, they're not."

I turned to the ladies on the platform, some were Pentecostals and some were not. Some belonged to a church that doesn't teach the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the speaking of tongues. I asked them, "Have these people ALL just been baptized with the Holy Ghost???" Every one of them, with their mouths agape, were nodding, indicating "Yes! Yes, they have."

We decided that we know probably why God only wanted women on this trip. This particular place had a strong Russian Orthodox Church which doesn't allow women to participate in the worship service in any way. God wanted the women there to know that He can use women. As a matter of fact, one of the things the Holy Spirit said was that He had a job for the women: He wanted them to knock on every door and tell everybody everywhere what He had done for them and that God wants to indwell them, too. So He made an assignment to the women.

Were there women or men who encouraged or mentored you?

Absolutely! My pastor was Bill McCall Sr. He said that when he would see me as a child, he would tell his wife that God had his hand on my life for a special purpose. That's encouraging! Another pastor's wife, Lois Mitchum, would put me on the piano stool and almost make me play. I would get so nervous

that I'd make so many mistakes. I'd be embarrassed and insist that she not do that again. But she'd put me right back there just as if I was playing good. At the time I didn't realize how much she was encouraging me. It had a wonderful after affect. My parents were encouragers and mentors. So many, many people. I thank God for all of them.

One outstanding mentor was Rev. Mrs. Carrie Graham. Both of my parents were raised in a denomination that doesn't allow women preachers. When they received the Holy Ghost baptism and moved into Holiness, Momma didn't seem to have the problem adjusting to them that Daddy did. You know God has a sense of humor, so when He wanted to send Daddy a special message, quite often he sent it by Momma Carrie! She was able to convince him God did call her. I think it is sort of humorous too, that I am one of five children, two of which are brothers. Daddy prayed so earnestly that God would call my brothers into ministry. God visited him one day and told him his sons would not preach but his daughter would. And Daddy was happy with that!

Carrie Graham was no kin to us. She was from Tennessee and married Bristol Graham who brought her to his home in Lake City. They never had children so she "spiritually-adopted" a lot of us. Not only was she a preacher but she was an intense intercessor. After she was widowed she had a prayer house built out behind her home. I remember wondering why that was necessary since she lived alone but it was her get-away, her place of uninterrupted communion with God. I understand it better now.

She came to preach revival in a neighboring community when I was seventeen. She stood in my face the first day of the revival, pointed her finger in my chest, looked me in the eye and said, "I've come here for you. God said it's time for you to get serious about serving Him. I will neither sleep nor eat until you have done that!" It was Friday night of the revival when I fully surrendered. By then she had fasted until she staggered. But when the anointing would come upon her, she would be strengthened to preach. I knew not to try to fool her. I feared God too much to try that anyway but it was like she had such a relationship with God, He told her everything. She would tell us what God was doing, what He was going to do, and it was always on target. She was my mentor.

And so were David and Erleen McKenzie. She had such a consuming vision and burden for the women of the Conference, especially the ministers' wives. It was like everything she did, everything she was, she did it with them in mind. She was a mentor to all of us.

Did you find women to mentor?

I certainly hope so! I pray so! First there was my daughter. She was a minister of song and music. She died of breast cancer in 2006. She was 46. In the latter years of her life it became apparent that she wanted to follow me as I followed Christ. Yes, there are women I took in as a daughter to encourage and inspire.

Were they woman preachers?

Yes. Some are ordained. Some are missionaries (at least one is). Many are teachers.

If you could speak to a woman who just got her license, to the young women, what would you say?

I would tell them to be very sensitive to the Holy Spirit, to listen, keep the fountain open and flowing! Jesus told the woman at the well, "I will be in you, a well of water, springing up to ever lasting life." The cares of life can easily camouflage His Presence. We must not allow that to happen. Listen for that small, still voice. Someone has called it a "gut feeling" but this is more than intuition. It is communication with God without which we can do nothing of any significance. The study of His word will keep the fountain flowing.

Prayer is also of utmost importance. I have taught that when you hear (or feel) that little soft impression saying, "Go pray!" that's the time to pray! Not "as soon as I finish this" or that but NOW. When one of my sons was eight months old, he was gliding around my feet in his walker and I was washing dishes when I heard that voice, felt that soft nudge. I hung up the dish towel, picked up my baby, went into the bedroom and sat him in the edge of his crib. I glanced at the clock. It was ten in the morning. I knelt to pray. Where I went and what I did, I have no idea. I came to myself lying on my face in the hall, the next room, worshipping God. I don't believe the memory of the communion I had with God that day will ever leave me! When I came to myself the first thing I thought about was my baby. I jumped up, ran back into the bedroom and he was still sitting in the same spot where I had placed him! It was 2pm. It had been four hours. I don't recommend a woman leaving her baby like that but if God says do it, He will take care of our circumstances if we will obey Him.