

November 2022

Divine Appointments & Angel Tree Christmas

I enjoyed the privilege of attending the Moody Bible Institute Pastor's Conference in Chicago in May 2010. I know the speakers were great, but I can't remember who they were or anything they said. I went online and found the list of all the speakers and a basic summary of their messages.

Paul Nyquist, the ninth president of Moody Bible Institute, gave the opening message at the 2010 Pastors' Conference and preached on how to fill intimidating ministry "shoes." Nyquist, who had been a pastor for 18 years, preached from Joshua 1 to illustrate the proper response to filling a ministry role held previously by a beloved and important person. Joshua followed Moses, the emancipator, prophet, lawgiver and father of Israel, and was able to fill Moses' big "sandals" not because he had impressive feet, but because he relied on the Lord's promises. God promised to be with Joshua as He had been with Moses, and also promised to give him constant victory if he obeyed all of the Lord's commands. With supplemental texts from Numbers 32, Acts 8 and 12, Judges 6, and Matthew 28, Nyquist challenged listeners to remember that, "When you are faced with filling a pair of large ministry shoes, remember if you have a big God, your shoe size is irrelevant." Case in point, the disciples stepped into the sandals of Jesus by the power of His Holy Spirit. Nyquist closed in prayer, asking the Lord to affirm His presence to every pastor and assure them that in Jesus, their little feet will fit in whatever shoes they are called to fill.

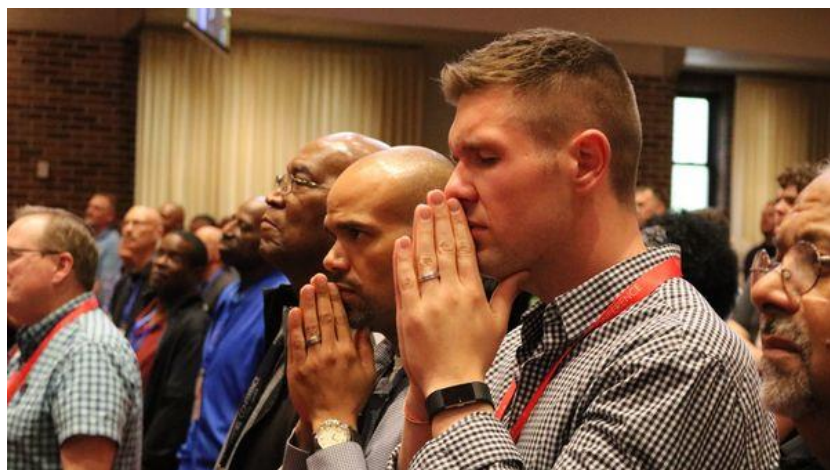


Photo from Moody Bible Institute Pastor's Conference, May 2018

My best memory is my divine appointment with Pastor Edwin Harris. It was Monday evening, after the evening session during dessert time. Pastor Edwin Harris sat to my right. When I engaged him in conversation and asked him a few questions, I learned that he was going through a very difficult time at the church where he served as Executive Pastor. I listened to him. I affirmed and encouraged him. And I prayed with him in the moment. I thought of him and prayed for him many times over the years. A few weeks ago, I followed a Holy Spirit prompt and called Pastor Edwin to let him know I was coming to the Chicago area. I was glad that he remembered me and asked if I could treat him to breakfast or lunch. We enjoyed a wonderful, almost three-hour lunch, with awesome, life-giving conversation!



When I asked Pastor Edwin Harris if he was willing to write part of his story for the November 2022 Newsletter, he said, "Yes."

The thought of God using a 'misfit' like me to do a great work for a Holy God was far-fetched and oftentimes unreal – yet the Lord has plans for us that are based on his Sovereign Will. I have learned in my almost 53 years on this earth, and my over thirty years of being an adult, that the Lord's plans are often beyond what we can imagine.

November 14th of this year (2022) marked 25 years of being a minister of the Gospel. On August 1st, 1997, the Lord moved my then pastor's heart (the late Bishop William L. Jordan) to lay hands on me and to inform me that God had 'called me and that I wasn't to listen to anyone else and that it was time for me to simply say yes...'

I had never been to seminary

I had never sat in a room with preachers and ministers

I knew I was exposed – yet I was scared.

A few months later, I preached my trial sermon with No Training (something I do not advocate for because I believe it's dangerous) – all because I served a pastor who Believed In Me...something unusual for my life because I grew up without the proper tutelage of a father and a guide. Suddenly going from the back of the church as an usher to the front of the church in the pulpit.

Four years later, I was called to the bedside of Bishop Jordan and was offered an opportunity to work besides the leader as Director of Ministries – and in January 2002, I was hired. Three years later in 2005, I was promoted to Executive Pastor and two years later our leader would become medically incapacitated and unable to discharge his duties. I was immediately expected to step up although we had a major problem. That problem was on the business side and there were some serious financial hurdles that needed to be jumped over. Because the leader was in a coma for almost two months, and his voice was silent, we began a long journey that I wished upon no one – not even my enemy.

Unfortunately, our by-laws were old and never used (at least not during my time at the church). Often, when things are seemingly going well, no one asks questions and so we went on with business as usual. When the deacons and trustees found out that we had a problem, they conducted the first of what would be 'ten' church meetings over the span of four years. During that four-year span, the leader made his transition (December 2008). Thirty days after his death, the head deacon announced that the pulpit was vacant, although I was sitting in the pulpit as Executive Pastor. Imagine for a moment having to

provide leadership in a church that was openly being divided and there wasn't anything I could do officially because my position wasn't in the by-laws.



A few months later (May 2009), the executive board had a special meeting/vote for me to become Senior Pastor. According to the by-laws I would need 75% of the vote. Once the votes were tallied, I received 74.6% and the board decided that they weren't going to round the number up to 75%. So, I remained as Executive Pastor of the church. The people were disappointed and unhappy. A series of meetings continued to ensue, and the executive board was trying to figure out what to do in this situation.

Unfortunately, the board wouldn't receive any outside pastoral direction and felt like they could handle the situation alone. A lawyer was hired to help provide some legal direction in the matter. In the fall of 2009, after it leaked out that the executive board was going to go out and suggest to the members that we allow Edwin Harris to serve as senior pastor for a two-year period – a TRO was obtained from the chancery division of the courts. And the legal battle began...

We are now entering 2010 and are having to go to court in downtown Chicago. Sitting in that court room was horrible for me. Why? Because I wasn't on either side – all I knew was that this wasn't bringing God glory. This battle was an internal battle – it was the Abide By The Bylaw Members versus the Executive Board of St. Mark. When you read the details, Edwin Harris was interspersed throughout the document. It was sad and disheartening. We had a series of meetings trying to work through this mess. Members were unhappy. Members didn't trust leadership.

During the summer of 2010, the judge agreed to hear the case. I called a good pastor friend of mine from Memphis, Tennessee and he advised me to figure out a way to get out of court because it was a mockery to God. I totally agreed with him. I approached the board and suggested to dismantle the board and simply have a Deacon's Ministry and a Trustee Ministry. I further explained to the board that I was going to Trust God – that if God wanted me to pastor St. Mark, He could work In the system, Through the system, Under the system, Behind the system – He was God. Lastly, I asked them to follow the pages of the by-laws that we did have, which meant we would have to have our annual meeting immediately. During that meeting, we would develop an Advisory Council and that Advisory Council would appoint a pastoral search committee together. All of this took place by the end of 2010. By the beginning of 2011, they began putting together all the procedures for looking for a senior pastor for the church. I waited. Once the window opened, I submitted my cover letter, references, and resume.

People from all over the country began submitting their resumes and there were several candidates that were contacted, vetted, and finally selected to be part of the finalists to come and try out for the position. A schedule was put in place and shortly thereafter, everyone who was on the schedule, except for one person, all canceled and bowed out.

It came down to one other person and me. On August 27, 2011, I received 77% of the vote to be pastor.

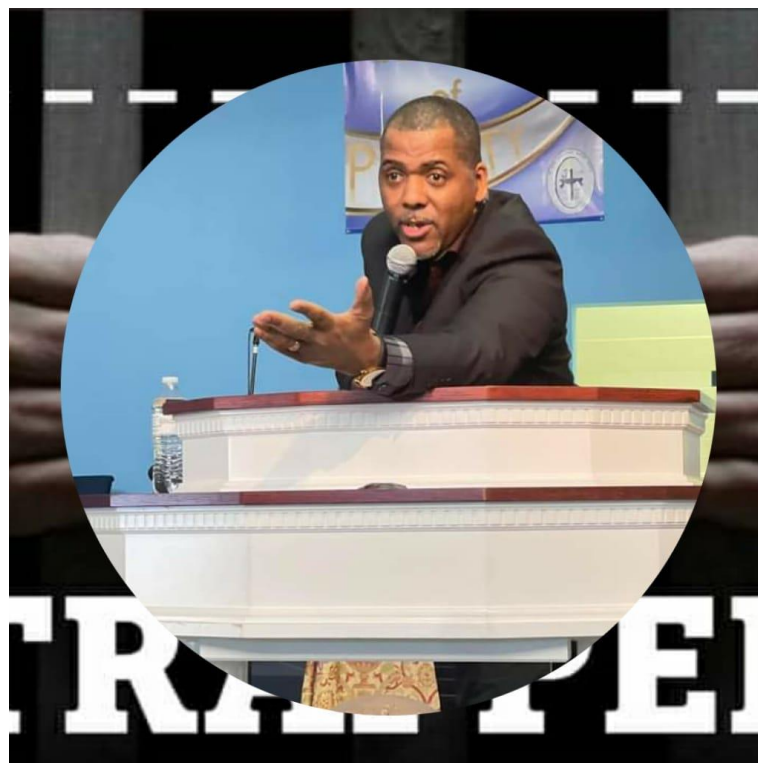


During this entire ordeal, we had 15 ministers on the team besides me. I made the decision to guard the pulpit and be a consistent voice of teaching and leading during a horrific time for our ministry. I had to transition from being a 'son' of the house to becoming a 'father' in the house. Furthermore, couples were still getting married, funerals still need to be officiated, Sunday morning worship and midweek bible study. We continued with leaders' meetings, Sunday school, children's ministry, etc. The work of the Lord continued – although with great pain, hurt, tears and sorrow.

There are many more details that go with this story, but I write this to say that every ministry needs a succession plan – and with proper and healthy leadership based on the Word of God. Lastly, going back to May 2009 when the board would not round up the vote tally (74.6), I realized later that I Was NOT READY. I am grateful for that decision.

Disappointment in one season – Gratefulness in the Next. To God be the Glory!

~~~ Pastor Edwin Harris



I thank God for the incredible blessing of my divine appointments with Pastor Edwin Harris! I thank God for his humility, his patience, his longsuffering and his steadfast endurance. At each stage in his journey, he was exactly where God wanted him to be. Through it all, he learned what is required to faithfully disciple and lead the flock God has entrusted to his care.

During the snow blizzard on Sunday, November 20, Sue and I decided to worship online with Pastor Edwin Harris. We had difficult connecting with the live stream broadcast of the service on Facebook, so we tried YouTube. We were unable to connect with the live stream, so I started watching the service recorded on Sunday, November, 13, which was two days before I had lunch with him in Chicago. Then it dawned on Sue that his time zone in Chicago is an hour earlier! We were early, but God is never late. God knew the message I needed to hear was the message Pastor Edwin delivered on Sunday, November 13. God always finds a way to bless me as I bumble along through life.

Pastor Edwin Harris' message on November 13 was titled "Just Do It." His Scripture Text was exactly what I needed to hear from Isaiah 30:23 "He will water the seed you plant in the ground, and the ground will produce crops in abundance. At that time your cattle will graze in wide pastures (New English Translation).

Because I was watching the previous week's message, rather than that Sunday's message as it was live-streamed, I was able to pause it, write my notes verbatim, and then continue. It took me a very long time to get through his message, because it was so good, I continued hitting pause and recording my notes in my spiral notebook with his exact wording. The result was twelve pages of notes which included four Holy Spirit prompt messages that I wrote on the pages along with my sermon notes.



At the end of the service, I was able to see the congregation honor Pastor Edwin Harris for 25 years of faithful ministry.



I invite you to join with me and the congregation of St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church in Harvey, IL, as we praise God and thank Pastor Edwin and Lady Beverly Harris for their 25 years of faithful service!

Angel Tree Christmas™ equips churches and other organizations to restore and strengthen relationships between incarcerated parents and their children and families. Every Christmas, Angel Tree mobilizes local churches and organizations to minister to hundreds of thousands of children by delivering a gift, the Gospel message, and a personal message of love on behalf of their mom or dad behind bars. In addition, many of our partner churches meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of prisoners' families by enfolded them in the day-to-day life of the church, helping children attend summer camp, and facilitating mentorship.

This Christmas, PastorCare West Michigan is sponsoring 15 children whose parents are incarcerated. Friends and colleagues where Sue works at CareLinc are purchasing Christmas gifts for 8 of the children. Sue and I are purchasing Christmas gifts for 7 of the children.



Please watch this short, inspiring video. Angel Tree: It Starts With A Gift

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2q46r2xirY>

Please join us in praying for Divine Appointments as Sue and I go to their appartments and houses to deliver these Christmas gifts to the children of those who are incarcerated. We are praying God will use us to help them experience the love and joy of Jesus this Christmas!



Thank you for partnering with PastorCare West Michigan to advance the Kingdom of God through your prayers and financial donations.

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