



The Spiritual Journey
of a **Recovering**
Baptist

Doug Manning

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InSight Books, Inc.
Edmond, Oklahoma

The Spiritual Journey of a Recovering Baptist

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First Edition ©2024

Published by
InSight Books, Inc.
PO Box 30053
Edmond, Oklahoma 73003

Cover Photo: “Two houses south of Lila Jean’s”
by Zachary Burns of Oklahoma City.

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Manufactured in the United States of America

ISBN 979-8-218-31602-0
eBook ISBN 979-8-218-31603-7
Audio Book ISBN 979-8-218-37426-6

Publisher’s Cataloging-in-Publication data

Names: Manning, Doug, author.

Title: The spiritual journey of a recovering Baptist / Doug Manning.

Description: Edmond. OK: InSight Books, Inc., 2024.

Identifiers: LCCN: 2023921849 | ISBN: 979-8-218-31602-0 (paperback) | 979-8-218-31603-7 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH Manning, Doug. | Clergy--Biography. | Christian life. | Spiritual biography. | Christian biography. | BISAC BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Memoirs | BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Religious

Classification: LCC BX6495 .M26 2024 | DDC 286.092--dc23

To dedicate this book to Barbara Maddox Manning, my wife for fifty-seven years would be very inadequate. We walked this journey hand-in-hand, heart to heart and spirit to spirit. She was more than my sounding board or wind beneath my wings she was in every sense the co-author of this book. I know she would agree with me to dedicate this work to the four daughters who made our lives such a joyous journey.

Glenda Stansbury

Kathy Burns

Cindy Perez

Sandra Sherry

— Doug Manning

Abbreviations used throughout the book:

KJV King James Version, 1987

NIV New International Version, Biblica Inc., 2011.

ESV English Standard Version, Crossway Bibles, 2016

If you are looking for a profound theological treatise you won't find it here; if you are looking for down-to-earth wisdom—you WILL find it here! Doug Manning's pastoral journey is rooted in the common life of a pastor who cherishes the relationship with God's people to such a degree that he actually listens, carefully, to them. Here you will find uncommon wisdom of a true pastor in his journey to follow Jesus rather than following what others say who Jesus is.

—Kevin Adams, Chaplain, Colonel, USAF (retired)

Imagine being on a journey, one filled with opportunity, beauty, the sublime, but also fraught with pitfalls, blind corners, mountaintops and deep, deep valleys. Now imagine finding a book. It's not so much a guidebook but a journal from a fellow wanderer and wonderer, one written from honesty, humility and grace. This latest book from the heart and soul of Doug Manning is that book.

When we were just newlyweds, Doug was our pastor at Southern Hills Baptist Church in Tulsa. Today, more than 50 years later, he is still our pastor, mentor, counselor and friend. Now we have this book and its stories that we love so much.

– Dave Fuller, Chief of Creative Strategies, Legacy Bank (retired)

Doug Manning's *Spiritual Journey* gives us a lifetime of experience and decades of accrued wisdom, with wit and as always masterful story telling. This is a refreshing, authentic and powerful exploration of the Christian faith.

—Dr. Wade McCoy, M.D., Family Practice Physician

As only he can, Doug Manning invites the reader to reflect on their own story while telling his, gently but persistently shepherding all of us towards wisdom and courage. This book is a treasure trove of unexpected grace, tender care, and resilient love. Doug's stories can help us live more deeply right now, so don't wait to begin.

—Rev. Dr. Lori Allen Walke, Senior Minister,
Mayflower Congregational UCC

Breathtaking, certainly a main topic for today. One favorite, out of many, is “Hang Around, Hug them, Hush!” Trust Presence, Trust Touch, Trust Silence.

—Kyle Maxwell, Minister Emeritus, First Christian Church,
Edmond, Oklahoma

Every chapter of this book is a work of art forged from life’s fire & darkness shaped by 91 years of living. As a whole, it becomes a massive sculpture of hope! It bears experiencing carefully for fear of missing its wisdom. Begin slowly and absorb it deeply for your own hope & life!

—Floyd A Craig, President, Craig Communications, Inc.,
Franklin, Tennessee

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Prologue

This book is not a criticism of the Baptist denomination. I was raised in the First Baptist Church in Frederick, Oklahoma, and I honor that church and the folks that helped raise me. We were a family. I have often said if some of those members saw me doing something wrong, they would not bother to tell my parents, they would punish me themselves. So please do not take these words as rejecting or making light of the root from which I was hewn. I don't know where I would be today without the grounding and guidance found there.

But as I spent my life in the ministry I gradually “worked out my own salvation with fear and trembling.” As a result, I bumped into some new ways to think and believe about the gospel we follow and share. As I began to express these ideas I was branded as a liberal and even tried for heresy by one deacon body. If I am a liberal, it is not because I no longer believe in the basic concepts I learned as a child. It is rather simply a new or different way to view or apply the very same truths to our lives.

This book is not written with any intent to argue with anyone else's faith, nor to even make comparisons between belief systems. It is written only for the purpose of understanding with the hope of being a very small effort toward unity in the Christian world. We desperately need to learn how to love one another while holding sacred the beliefs of every person.

My dream is to have the chance to tell what I believe and how I came to believe what I believe. Some things came from pain and struggle, some from ideas whose source is a mystery to me, many from encounters with people and some from epiphanies that I believe came from God.

Every word in this book may be wrong and should be taken with a grain of salt. I claim no inerrancy at all, but every word seems to fit me so perhaps some might fit someone else. So as the Lord says, “Come let us reason together.”

CHAPTER ONE

The Break in the Sidewalk

There is a break in the sidewalk two houses south of Lila Jean's house on 12th Street in my hometown. Somebody took out several sections to make a temporary driveway. No pavement of course. Someone just cut out a section of the curb and threw in some gravel. My spiritual journey began on the section where the sidewalk ended.

I was walking home from school by myself when I was in the second grade, thinking what all little seven-year-old boys think, when I had some kind of an encounter with God. I cannot describe it, nor can I explain it, but suddenly a presence overwhelmed me, and it seemed like God and I formed some kind of connection. I still have no idea how to explain this encounter. I have never counted it as my conversion since I went through the Baptist version of that at age nine.

I do not see that as some kind of special anointing or calling, for I do not believe God has special pets who get exclusive gifts and possibilities. I honestly believe whatever God has to give is available to everyone and there certainly is nothing special about me as these writings will attest.

A year or so ago, my daughter helped me find that very spot and, not surprisingly, it is still there over eighty years

later, and it is still a “temporary” driveway. When we found the place, I stood there once again, not in any effort to remember because I had never forgotten that place nor that experience. Since that first day I have always had a sense of God’s presence. I cannot claim that I have always followed or pleased God. For many years that presence was more like Jiminy Cricket in Pinocchio, some kind of conscience trying to keep me straight when it was evident mine could not do the job. But God was always there even when I am sure the surroundings were not comfortable. Thank God for the presence and coming in the nick of time, for at this same time I was in the process of building some terrific feelings of inferiority and fear.

My mother came from a large family, most of whom lived in my hometown. These were wonderful, fun-loving and caring folks who would never under any circumstances do anything to hurt me, but they loved to tease.

Evidently my older brother Tom was the most beautiful baby ever born and, quite literally, I must have been the ugliest baby that was ever allowed to live. Every time the family got together someone would tell me what an ugly baby I was, and everyone would laugh. I really expect to hear that in the grand reunion of heaven. Yes, it was a joke, and I would laugh with them, but no one ever told me that I got over being ugly so, with never an intent, they programed me to believe I was ugly.

I have a picture of my brother and me hanging in my house. My brother was six and I was four. In my teens that picture was too old to display but it was hanging in a closet. I would often go there and stare trying to figure out why they thought I was so ugly.

At the same time, I had begun noticing how my mother doted over my brother Tom and bragged about his accomplishments to anyone who would listen. Then one day I overheard such a session, and I heard her say, “Well Doug has to work for the grades he gets in school.” That day I became dumb to go along with ugly and everything changed. Another brother came along, and I became the unblessed middle child in the home who felt unworthy of even being there.

Looking back, I can see how hard I tried to finally earn the blessing. I helped do the family wash, hung out the clothes, took them in and did a great deal of the ironing. I was the one called upon to repair things and do the work my brothers did not want to do.

I got a job in a grocery store, or rather my mother got me a job in a grocery store, when I was twelve. The store was owned and operated by a couple and the wife was an especially close friend of my mother’s. I worked for that store until I went to college, but always was made to feel like I only had the job because of the friendship.

Often turning points in our lives happen so naturally we do not notice and, most of the time, do not recognize their impact until many years later. From junior high on, I somehow had a terrible reputation that I had no idea how I got it or why anyone would think that about me. Looking back many years later, it made sense.

In seventh grade, the school administrators announced they were starting a junior high football team, and anyone who wanted to play was to be at a meeting that day. I attended and was excited at the prospect. The coach laid out the plans and then told us to show up the next day with our cleats and we would have our first practice. That was the

first I had heard about having to furnish our own football shoes and, of course, I did not have enough money to buy my own. So, I did not show up the next day. My lack of self-worth made it seem impossible for me to ask my parents to buy the shoes for me.

The result was all the “good” kids were on the team and running around with their teammates and I was the outcast kid with no friends. I made friends with the other outcast guys, some of whom were pretty tough characters. I did not become a part of their gang, but somehow was seen as being a part by many people. That group of guys came by my house one night to see if I wanted to go with them, but I made some excuse and did not go. Evidently my father saw them there and that very night they were all arrested for stealing hub caps and somehow, I was guilty by association.

I finally found a group to be a part of and they were not the top of the line. Most were a year older than I and we were kind of scrubby, I guess, and looked down on by some. Funny thing, later in life, three of us became ministers.

Since they were older than I, they became members of a Sunday School class taught by my father. I cannot count the number of times when the members would come out of the class laughing and telling me that my father had used me as a bad example again that morning. It always baffled me trying to figure out how I was a bad example. All I did was go to school and work. Dad seemed to be fixated on my bad reputation and perhaps was trying to reach me through the class. He never tried to discuss it with me, nor offer the guidance he must have thought I needed. We never talked.

When I was fifteen, I happened to walk into a room where my father and the superintendent of schools were visiting. They were great friends and had a side business

together. When I walked in, my father suddenly needed to leave the room for some reason, leaving me with the superintendent which seemed like a set up. It was. He talked with me for a while, then said what I remember as these exact words: “Doug I have been giving a lot of thought to you and your life and I must admit that about the only thing I can come up with that you would be good at is a pimp.” That’s a helpful thing to say to a kid who already thinks he is dumb and ugly.

None of this matters to me at all now. I write it not to find sympathy but to show how deep and how powerful finding the love of God can heal our lives. You need to know where I have been in order to see the truth that all that I have been and all I have done came as a gift for which I can never show enough gratitude.

I am not a victim of bad or cruel parents. I have never blamed who I am or what I have done on my raising. Looking back, I must say that I grew up in a very unusual family setting and style. My brothers and I had very little of what would be considered as normal parenting. There have been times when I resented some of the lifestyle, but then I explored the lives my parents lived and began to understand. They were not good parents, but they were as good as they knew how to be. Neither of them came from what would normally be called a home.

My mother was the oldest of seven children. Five girls followed by two sons. When the youngest was nine months old their father contracted blood poisoning and died. He was a tenant farmer and did road grading for the county, so they were far from wealthy.

Mother dropped out of school her sophomore year and found work in a bank and became the sole support of the