

Just Plain VANILLA
*A Pastor's
Story*

Practical Help For All In Ministry

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Story*

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WALLACE PHILLIPS


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This book is dedicated to my loving wife, Joy, who has walked every step of the journey with me. You made me shine when I shouldn't have. And to the JAZ clan—Josh, Abi, and Zach—our three wonderful children who have faced ministry life with courage.



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- To the Pastors and families of the majority of churches in America (congregations of less than 100 people).
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Foreword

Pastor Wallace Phillips is the kind of pastor every pastor loves, so it is only fitting that he would write a book that would bless everyone. Just Plain Vanilla takes you on a journey with Wallace as he walks with God from the beginning of his ministry until now. This book will challenge and strengthen your faith as you watch God direct this man's steps. Pastor Phillips not only shares his triumphs, but he shares his struggles so that each of us can relate to the process of growth in his life.

As you read this book you'll be thankful, as I am, that Wallace Phillips remained true to God's call on his life. By the way, this will not be the last time you hear from Wallace Phillips, for his journey has not ended, his ministry is taking off!

Dr. B. Courtney McBath
Senior Founding Pastor
Calvary Revival Church
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A Word From the Pastor's Wife

When you meet Wallace more than likely you'll find him with someone along for the ride. That someone may be a person in ministry that just needs a friend, an ear, or a brief break away from the pressures of ministry. Or it may be an addict needing help with boundaries, a teenager expelled from school for a few days trying to prove they are loved, or a person needing a place to stay. But most of the time it will be someone who feels the call to ministry and needs encouragement, direction, prayer, experience, and support. Interestingly to me, Wallace will grab that wonderful opportunity to invest in this person, no matter how busy his schedule is. He truly believes and lives out the example of Barnabas. Barnabas means "Son of Encouragement."

I must admit at times I would become frustrated and even jealous of the time he spent and invested in these people who would receive from his devoted leadership only to become strong enough to minister or stand on their own. I missed the road time of being able to talk and have Pastor to myself. I missed being the sidekick. I didn't like sharing surprise lunches with others, and often adding

numbers to a quickly fixed meal after a long day at work. I remember thinking, “Just when they become an asset to our ministry, they’re gone.” “Why waste all that time if they’re just gonna’ leave us?” I wasn’t getting the big scene. The purpose of ministry is to reach the lost and disciple them. Yes, many can be used in a ministry, but sending out others is the commission from God.

I wasn’t sure why Wallace felt the need to share his story in book form until recently. I realized that sometimes people in ministry find themselves hurt and abandoned. It becomes our choice what to do in that hurt. Many people in ministry have fallen, given up, and forsaken God. If Wallace can help some by telling of his experience then it’s worth sharing. Again, the encourager comes out. Maybe because of a God-given talent, maybe because of biblical instruction, maybe out of realizing how others blessed him, or maybe times that encouragement was missing from others and had to be gained as David experienced; through himself. The Bible says that “David encouraged himself in the Lord” (I Samuel 30:6).

Just Plain Vanilla is often how Wallace has gained trust from others. No fluff, no frill, “just plain vanilla.” Interestingly enough, the simpler he is, the more diverse his ministry has become. He’s found out what we all know is true— just *real* is all we need. A *real* God....in a *real* world....working with *real* people....in *real* situations. Get real, or as Wallace would say “just plain vanilla.”

Joy Phillips

For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

2 Timothy 1:6

CHAPTER 1



And He Gave Pastors

It was a blistering cold December day in 1983. I was making my way to a small town in a rural area of North Carolina. I was scheduled to fill the pulpit of a small church whose pastor had resigned. My brother-in-law was with me on the journey. Paul was a gifted musician and there was always a sense of security in knowing that we could function musically should the church not be equipped in that vital area of ministry. Praise and worship is foundational in any service and I wanted to be prepared.

My wife, Joy, was at home that day. She had stayed behind with our newborn son, Joshua. Joy, Paul, and I traveled regularly in a ministry of preaching, singing, and puppetry. We were usually quite busy filling in for vacationing pastors, illness, or just a special invitation to share our ministry to the family. We had a home church and were faithful there when we were not traveling.

I had no intention of pastoring a church. In fact, I remember clearly stating, “I would never pastor a church. I feel like God has called us to evangelize”. Never say what you’ll never do when it comes to the work of God. Little did I know that God would use

this day and this place to begin something very special in my heart. The enjoyment of seeing a new congregation each week and never feeling their struggles and sorrows would be replaced with an overwhelming sense of care and compassion for the flock of God.

We were always accustomed to the same responses—“That was wonderful!” “It was so good to have you today.” “I feel like that was just what I needed.” And the list goes on. We were only experiencing the joys of ministry. We were not facing the frustrations that become a part of the life of a pastoral family.

It was like making a trip to the beautiful North Carolina Mountains. We would go through the uphill climbs and the downhill runs with the “oohs and aahs” of the beauty and wonder of God’s handiwork, but the twists and turns didn’t bother us. We would be on level ground in a few days. It was easy for us to enjoy the awe of our journey to the mountains, but the day-to-day realities of curvy roads and falling rocks were not a part of our lives.

That particular day has never escaped my mind. When I become discouraged and tempted to pursue an area of ministry that has fewer “twists and turns”, I recall that sense of burden and care that had to come from God.

As Paul and I approached that small town I remembered my conversation with the church family that had contacted us about filling the pulpit that day. They had been given our names through one of the leaders in our denomination. This couple had assumed the responsibility of making certain that someone was there to minister. When we arrived at the church it was clear as to why they were the ones that were communicating with us—there was no one else there. A husband, wife, and three sons were the church.

The service went well. Paul and I ministered in song and I preached a message from the sixth chapter of Romans. After our time of ministry, we were taken out to lunch where we had opportunity to talk about the church and its history. After a nice meal we made our way back to the church where we said our goodbyes.

I had informed this couple of my feelings about pastoring. “I’m not interested in pastoring a church,” I said. But as I returned home my days and nights were filled with images of that hundred-seat sanctuary with particleboard floors. I could see the red piece of carpet that was simply draped over the edges of the pulpit. The parsonage, which was a mobile unit donated by the Women’s Ministries in the early 60’s, was almost gone. The porch was rotten and we couldn’t go in because the flooring in the parsonage was gone as well. Black roofing sealer had run down the front edge of the mobile home giving it a “chocolate sundae” look. The left side of the church had not been finished. Tall weeds ascended up above the block-structured walls. In fact, everywhere I looked that day I could see the need for much improvement.

I clearly got the message concerning this church. Attendance had steadily declined, the pastor had left, and they were one family away from being a church in building only. It seemed that the Holy Spirit would not allow me to forget this place. “Someone has to do something,” I thought. My days and nights were filled with vivid pictures of a church in desperate need.

I shared my experience with Joy. Over and over I talked of this church and what I had discovered. In just a few weeks she would travel back with me to minister at that church. We had taken the month of December off as far as traveling was concerned. We would resume our schedule at the first of the year. I was asked to preach for them again at that time.

Joy and I, along with our newborn son, made our way back there in January. It was cold that day. A little winter weather had shown up and there was a patch of ice on the steps. One step up and Joy ended up in what grandma used to call “sprawled out” on the cement entrance to the church. It seemed as if all the negative things had a way of surfacing. Joy found out that day that all of the imagery I had given to her was true. One trip to the church and she returned home with a sense of burden as well. Somehow we

sensed that God was redirecting us. We continued our schedule for a short while, but soon begin to cancel some of our scheduled engagements. I left one revival to preach for a church in the Spring, but we had to change directions totally because, you guessed it, we were now preparing to serve in that ministry office that I said we never would—we were pastors.

We had been working with the youth of our home church in Northeastern North Carolina on Wednesday nights. So that, too, came to a close. We ministered our final Sunday evening service in our home church as our Pastor prayed for us and sent us on our way. That night was special as friends came together and shared special gifts with us at our final night of fellowship together following the service.

Be careful what you say that you will never do. As a pastor now of over twenty years, I can often hear myself say, “I’ll never pastor a church”. Somehow God has a wonderful way of reminding us that He is the one who places the call on our lives. “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be *pastors* and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11).

**. . . Never say what you’ll never do in ministry.*