

Oral History Interview of Dr. Harold Willmington

Date of Interview: August 5, 2010

Location of Interview: Recording Studio of the Student Radio Station, 90.9 The Light

Name of Interviewee: Dr. Harold Willmington

Name of Interviewers: Randy Miller and Dr. Cline Hall

Transcriber: Jesse Ronda

Interview Length: (1:39:57)

Notes:

Unknown: (0:01) Rolling.

Miller: (0:02) Welcome to this interview in the oral history project of the Liberty University archives. This interview is being conducted on August 5, 2010. Today we're interviewing Dr. Harold Willmington. My name is Randy Miller. I'll be conducting the interview today all with Dr. Cline Hall...

Hall: (0:20) Good after...

Miller: (0:21) Greetings, Dr. Hall.

Hall: (0:22) Good afternoon.

Miller: (0:23) And hello, Dr. Willmington.

Willmington: (0:25) Hello there.

Miller: (0:27) Well as we begin today, could you tell us a little bit about your early life? Tell us where you were born, where you were born and a little bit about your family history.

Willmington: (0:37) I was born April the 7, 1932 and my mother traveled a thousand miles to be at my side and I was born in Patterson, Illinois; counting the dogs and cats,

population of about three hundred. And then when we were, I was about nine years old, we moved to Mount Vernon, Illinois and there at Mount Vernon I began to attend a little Southern Baptist church; the Logan Street Baptist Church. And when I was sixteen, I walked forward and accepted Christ as my savior and that was the, about this time of the year. I don't know the exact, the exact day, date but I do know it was in August of 1948.

Miller: (1:23) Ok, so you were a sixteen-year-old teenage boy. Now...

Willmington: (1:25) Yes.

Miller: (1:26) was the rest of your family believers?

Willmington: (1:28) Yes. They did not go to church much back then but yes, they, they were believers.

Miller: (1:35) So as you come out of your high school years and you're planning to go to college, what were you thinking about doing for a career and where did you go to college?

Willmington: (1:45) Well, when I got saved, one of the reasons I did not want to get saved, I didn't want to go to hell, that's for sure, but I just knew that if I got saved God would call me to preach and that's the last thing I wanted to do; the last thing. And so, but I did accept Christ and then there was this passion to know more about the Bible and so what I did, well, back then, I should say, I had a, a bad habit. I won't tell you what it was but there were twenty in a package...

Hall: (2:22) [*laughter*]

Willmington: (2:23) and actually I was living in, in tobacco country, southern Illinois, and everybody smoked. My dad smoke, my...thank goodness my mother didn't but all my relatives smoked, the pastor of the church smoked a pipe and so the deacons smoked.

I honestly thought it was one of the requirements to be a deacon, you had to smoke. But I just knew, I didn't have the surgeon general telling me, "Hey, you shouldn't smoke," but I just knew that if God wanted me to preach, which I didn't want to preach, but at any rate, he didn't want me to smoke. And so I tried my best, I just couldn't give it up. And then I heard a, a lecture, a sermon on the rapture and that really just petrified me. I thought, "My soul," just think of going up blowing smoke. And so, true story, how dumb was I, I would inhale a cigarette and go [*exhales*] real fast and because I didn't want to get caught. Well, I think the turning point came several years later. Now, those who believe in lordship salvation would say, "Now you weren't saved in the first place." But I was. In fact, I led a number of my buddies to Christ. I'd say, "Here, have a cigarette," and we'd smoke and then we'd get down, "Put your cigarette out," and, and they'd accept the Lord. But I just, I just couldn't break it. And so I went to a, a small Southern Baptist college across the river, the old Mississ-sloppy River in Hannibal, Missouri and there I met a young man who was different from all other preachers, some of the preachers are pretty wild back then, and his name was **Johnny Graham** and he was a graduate of the Moody Bible Institute. And I thought, "There's something different about him." So he befriended me and he said, "Now Harold, if God has called you to preach, you'll have no rest what-so-ever until you submit to Him and I'd like to see you go to Moody." And so in 1952, the summer, I decided it'd be easier to get in, I made application to go to Moody Bible Institute. And so I was working in a little hamburger joint and the, the uh...the telephone rang at busy time and they said that, and I thought it was God on the other end, "Is this Harold Willmington?" I said, "Yes it is." "This is **Ralph Snow**," one of the sneakiest deans of any college in the world and he said, "I'm going through your

application here and you said that you've, you've never been married and you're not divorced obviously," and this and that, etcetera. But he said, "You left out one question and we need to know the answer to it." And I said, "Alright," and I knew what was coming. "You said you had smoked this year but you realized that you had, you know, to give up that to be a, a good Christian. How long has it been since you quit smoking." I had a cigarette in my mouth [*laughter*] and I said, "Well, sir, it hasn't been very long." And he said, "Well, would you say three or four months?" I said, "Yes." "Would you say a couple months?" I said, "Yes," and I'll give it to his credit that he thought, he probably knew the situation. He said, "I'll just put down that you don't smoke." I said, "Alright." And so, but, so a few weeks later, I enroll, I entered Moody Bible Institute and I threw away my last cigarette at ten o'clock and I had an appointment with the dean at ten thirty and I stopped at a little drug store, this was in the '50s, and got some Sinsan, that's that wicked liquid take away, to take away the smell of tobacco and then I took some Wrigley's gum to take away the smell of Sinsan...

Hall: (5:58) [*laughter*]

Willmington: (5:59) So I walked in there hoping he didn't uh...that he had a cold, he couldn't smell my...so at any rate, that's been, what, sixty years ago and I think I've, I've cut the, I've broken the habit, so...then I graduated from Moody 1955. And then I went back to Hannibal Lagrange and I finished up at junior college and later went to Culver Stockton College in Canton, Missouri and got my Bachelor's. And after that I attended Dallas Theological Seminary, didn't graduate, I got married shortly after that and then Ashland Theological Seminary, in Ashland, Ohio, and finally, years later when I came

here, I finished my doctorate at Trinity Seminary, it's not Trinity University in Deerfield, Illinois.

Miller: (6:47) Now, when you were at Moody in those early days, did you sense kind of the passion that you sensed at Liberty in those early days here of Liberty? It seems like everybody that we talk to talks about a very pioneering spirit on campus...

Willmington: (7:02) Oh, absolutely, yes.

Miller: (7:03) But I'm, I'm wondering of your, of your Moody background, was it similar to that in those days?

Willmington: (7:09) Oh, it was certainly was. I just thought I died and gone to heaven, you know, and I wouldn't have dared to broken a rule. It gave me, if I accomplished anything, it was because of those one hundred hours, because I went to, it's a three year program but I had some, I took some extra credit that I went to Moody. I don't think that I would be here today had it not been for that because when I finished up at a very liberal college and it was, I used to say church affiliated or church afflicted with a certain denomination, it wasn't Southern Baptist, but I had to defend, at this religious school, every truth that I had ever believed in. I remember my sociology teach said, "You know," she's, she didn't know what struggles I was going through, but she said, "You never really believe something until you have to defend it." And thank God for D.L. Moody.

Hall: (8:05) Now, now was Moody, I'm not for sure the chronology here, was he still living or...?

Willmington: (8:09) No, no, Moody died in 1899...

Hall: (8:13) Ok.

Willmington: (8:14) and he established the school, I'm not sure, I think in the late eighteen, late 1870's or 1880's. And at that time it was a two year program but when I went it was a three year program and now they have three years and four years and they have a pretty well fully developed religious academic program.

Miller: (8:33) But when you went there it was Moody Bible Institute...

Willmington: (8:35) Yes.

Miller: (8:36) and you weren't really even working on a Bachelor's Degree...

Willmington: (8:38) No, no.

Miller: (8:39) it was more of a certificate of...

Willmington: (8:40) A certificate. They had agreement though back then, not that it was great, if you graduated from Moody, then you could go to Wheaton College and Wheaton College was the Christian school in the world back then and they would start you in as a junior. And so in five years you would have the best of two of the best institutions, probably, in America. I didn't do that. When I finished Moody I, as I said, later went onto some seminaries and college but yes, that was, those three years were in, just invaluable to me.

Hall: (9:11) Now, what was your experience like at Moody as a, as a student? Were there very strict regulations and...

Willmington: (9:17) Well, everything is relative, you know...

Hall: (9:19) Yeah.

Willmington: (9:20) and so probably not a lot different from our school here. The, the music was different [*laughter*]...

Hall: (9:30) [*laughter*]

Willmington: (9:31) Thank God for those great hymns. But hey, I understand, you know, modern times, modern music. No, I think the, we call them chapels, we didn't have to call them convocations, we had them Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. We opened the class with prayer like we did here. Basically, I think, all things being equal, they were about the same.

Miller: (9:54) Now, how did you then go into your first pastorate?

Willmington: (9:59) Well as I said, I graduated from Moody in 1955 and I moved back to Quincy, Illinois, that's where my mom and dad lived and dad had a Christian bookstore so I helped out a little bit. And so, but I felt well, I needed to get into the pastorate so when I was finishing, it's long, it's a long story, at Hannibal Lagrange, my junior it's, it's a AA program, this little church in Griggsville, Illinois opened up. A little regular Baptist, GARB church; we called it Grand Army the Righteous Baptist. And so they were looking for someone to pastor their little church. We averaged about thirty-five or forty. So I drive down there, it was about seventy-five miles, and I would preach Sunday mornings, Sunday nights and then drive back and I was staying in the, in the dorm in Hannibal there, and so I was there for several years until nineteen uh...from 1955 to 1957.

Miller: (11:00) Well I just, so we have the historical record right, GARB really stands for the General Association of Regular Baptist.

Willmington: (11:06) Yes, that's right

Hall: *[laughter]*.

Miller: (11:07) We'll get that on the uh...

Willmington: (11:08) And I can't knock...

Miller: yeah [*laughter*].

Willmington: (11:09) that because I was ordained at the Calvary Baptist Church in Quincy, Illinois and that's a GARB church. I was associate pastor there for a little bit and my wife and I were married there so yes, that's a little joke though.

Miller: (11:22) And, and so tell us how you met your wife and what was her maiden name. Tell us a little about that.

Willmington: (11:28) Ok, a friend of ours, and he's still a friend, we saw him the other, a few months ago, introduced, when I was pastoring this little church, me to sue and she lived in the area in Milton, Illinois. And so I, I, we courted for a while and then I left to go to Dallas and I couldn't quit thinking about her and so I came back from Dallas just the one year and I was going to go on come back the second year but I helped my dad in the, in the bookstore, took a year to help him in the Christian bookstore. And so I got engaged to a nurse and then one night at a revival meeting I happened to attend, a friend of mine was pastoring, and I saw her in the front row by herself and I thought, "I can't marry this gal. I'm going to marry her." Well she was engaged to a soldier. So like, Cline, Dr. Falwell used to say, "Everything is fair in love and war."

Hall: (12:26) [*laughter*]

Willmington: (12:27) And so I began to move in on the poor fellow and so finally, after about a year, I convinced her what a wonderful fellow I was and so we were married in 1961 at uh...in Quincy, Illinois.

Miller: (12:43) Go ahead.

Hall: (12:44) Where did you first hear about Jerry Falwell in this process?

Willmington: (12:48) Ok, I was pastoring a church in 1971, 1970 actually, The Emmanuel Baptist Church in South Haven, Indiana, which is near Valparaiso. And my good friend Elmer Towns...and I had known Elmer since the, the 1950's. So we've known each other for about fifty-two years and we could squeal on each other and put both each of the other guy in jail. So at that time Elmer was teaching at Trinity Seminary and I was pastoring a church in, near Valparaiso. So we would meet periodically, halfway in Chicago on occasion and, and find out what the other guy was up to and tell the latest joke and maybe what prayer we needed and what the other guy was up to. Well, in the, in 1970, I think the last part of 1970, he said, "You know, I'm leaving Trinity." I said, "I'm sorry. Where you going, man?" He said, "Well," he said, "I'm going to Lynchburg, Virginia." And I said, "Where?" "Yeah," he said, "I'm going to go down there and I'm going to help start a school for Jerry Falwell." And I said, "Who?" And so, well, he did that and later on I found out about the where and the who and so about that time in '71, Jerry Falwell, the Old Time Gospel Hour began to appear on our radio station there near Valparaiso. And so in the beginning, in February, 1972, he said, "We've had a good semester and we want you to come down and hold a seminar for the students." I said, "Well that's great because, you know, I'd love to do that." So I came down and he said, "Now, you're going to have fifteen hours academia," and we have hernias now. He dismissed school for the entire week and I had the students from nine until twelve Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. He introduced me to the hundred and fifty-four students and walked out. Well, I had a wonderful time and hopefully they did to, so on Friday, Falwell took me to lunch, first official meeting I had with him. He said, "Now," he said, "we started," uh...Libert uh... "Lynchburg Baptist

College last year.” I said, “Yes.” And he said, “We plan to start the seminary next year, in ’73. But in ’72, this September, we want to start a Bible institute like at Moody.” And I said, “That’s what I heard.” And he smiled and he said, “Now, that’s why we got you here. We didn’t tell you that but Towns said, ‘We got to get Willmington here to help us,’ and, and the students said, ‘Yeah, we need him.’” And, and I said, “Well thank you but God has called me to preach and so...” but any rate, it took me, took me five months, four months I guess, to really determine the will of God that this was not an opportunity, this was a call. So they flew me down a couple of times and so finally I said yes and we got here, I got here a little before my wife did, but my wife and my son, who is now associate pastor at Thomas Road Baptist Church, got here the last June, Sunday in June of 1972. We had dinner on the ground, we had uh...Colonel uh...Sanders there and we had Bob Harrington and had nineteen thousand there in the baseball stadium. I don’t want to keep rambling on here but I remember...

Miller: (16:04) That’s great, this is the history...

Willmington: (16:05) but I remember...

Miller: (16:06) Was it the Lynchburg City Stadium?

Willmington: (16:07) Yes, yes.

Miller: (16:08) Ok.

Willmington: (16:09) And I remember Colonel Sanders getting up there, he was a crusty old guy, and he had his uniform on, just everything, and he said, “You know brother Jerry,” he said, “before I got saved I, I just cussed like a trooper.” He said, “I got saved and I don’t cuss nearly as much now.” *[laughter]*

Hall: (16:25) *[laughter]*

Willmington: (16:26) Jerry's going like this, and so, well anyway, that was, as they say, the rest is history. So we started the Bible Institute, a two year program. Started it in September, back then we started in September, not August like we do today, with a hundred...no, no, with fifty-two students, fifty-two students.

Hall: (16:46) Now, that was the campus...

Willmington: (16:47) Yes, the campus...

Hall: (16:48) institute...

Willmington: yes.

Hall: (16:49) Yeah, ok.

Miller: (16:50) And let's go back before we start really going into the Liberty history then, just from that first pastorate was in 1955, your final pastorate then, you finished in 1972, give us just a little bit of the background of those churches that you were in. What were some of the churches that you back uh...pastored?

Willmington: (17:07) Ok, well as I said, the little church and I think they put up with me for a couple of years and I learned to preach and it took me a long time and Saturday night I would...it was a big church, very, very small congregation, but, it'd probably seat five hundred and we'd have about fifty. So I had practiced my sermons Saturday night. I'd get behind the pulpit and I had half the pews under conviction, you know, so, but any rate, I think I learned to preach there. And then my second church, well let's see now, it was in uh...Mansfield, Ohio and it was a small church and we were able to put up a couple of buildings, we hired a couple of fulltime people, and that was in 1962, 1961 to 1965. That's in, that was the Emmanuel Baptist Church and turned out, later on, later on, I'm sorry, turned out to be the Community Bible's Church in Mansfield, Ohio. And then

I made the biggest mistake of my life. I was invited to candidate at a large northern church, I won't tell you where, but I decided, "Yes, I'm going to do that," and they called me and as that's to say, gentlemen, it was the biggest, and I tell our pastors, "Boy, make sure when you jump from one place that you know what God wants you to land on the next lily pad," and I think I had this idea, I know I did, "Lord, you probably heard the rumor, I'm going to this church and I'm going to take my furniture, I'm going to take my wife, I'm going to take that little old Chihuahua dog that bites me and my son and it would be great if you could come to." And I got up there and I wasn't there two weeks until I realized, "Dear God, I've made a terrible mistake." I had twenty-four on my board, twenty-four members on the board. Five uh...nearly twelve of them were John R. Rice fans, and I thank God for John R. Rice. The other twelve, many of them worked for the Billy Graham organization and back then it was world war three between these two and so I was in the middle being shot at by, by both sides, I guess, and I was young and very, frankly, I, I talked more than, and, and listened less and I've learned a lot since then. So after four years, I decided, "You know, I'm not going to, I don't want to bring dissention," and so I, I decided I'd resign and preach a message on the cross and, and to get people together and then I said, "We will," I told my wife, "We'll go to Wheaton. I want to finish my Master's at Wheaton." And so, ok, so we packed all of our furniture and went to Wheaton. Well I had a thousand dollars in the bank and I thought, "That'll last me until the Millennium." And we got down there and I realized after about a month, I'm running out of money. And so she said, "What are we going to do?" And I said, "Well now two things; we're not going to, we're not going to," I couldn't go to school, didn't have the money, "we're not going to mooch off of my parents or your parents." I

said, "I'll get a job." And I said, "You know, it'll be fun for a couple of months. Maybe build up the old muscles and then I'm sure Moody Memorial Church will open up, you know?" Well, that two months lasted for two years and I wound up, eventually, traveling everyday, sometimes ten or twelve hours a day, leaving Wheaton, this little townhouse, traveling through seventeen miles of Chicago traffic. My wife would be crying as I left. I said, "Don't cry. God's going to take care of us." And I'd cry all the way there myself and, "Had you forgotten me? You don't love me?" And for the next two years, I, I became a **herald** baptizer. Not baptizing people but baptizing tractor parts in this slimy stuff at the International Harvester in Melrose Park, Indiana uh...Melrose Park, Illinois. I can tell you all kinds of stories about that time, I'll just tell you the one. I got to the place where, and I've told our students this, where I not only doubted the goodness of God, I doubted the very existence of God. And I said, "I don't believe you're a, a cruel God but maybe you're no God. Because I don't think, I've never cheated on my wife. I don't uh...smoke, drink, cuss, chew, go with the girls who do and you're not helping me." So I decided, "I, I'm not going, we're not going to church anymore." So the first Sunday morning, I think my son was three years old, and he came running into this little bedroom, jumped on my bed, "Daddy, daddy, get up. It's time to go to Sunday school." And I looked at him, I said, "We're not going to Sunday school." And turned around and tried to go back to sleep. Well that wasn't what he was expecting. And so he left the room and he came back a couple minutes later crying and he pulled my face around to his and he said, "Daddy, don't we love Jesus anymore in this house?" [*laughter*] Whew, I said to my, "We got thirty minutes to get out of here [*laughter*] for Sunday school. My goodness, cook that boy's breakfast." So I, as they say in the south, that learned me to

uh...not to suck eggs. And so, but, it was a series of miracles and a church opened up in South Haven, Indiana and that's where Elmer and I used to meet in Chicago when I was pastoring there so.

Miller (23:08) Ok, well thank you for sharing that...

Willmington: (23:09) Ok.

Miller: (23:10) story. Alright, so you come here in 1972, in the first place, where, where were your classes held?

Willmington: (23:18) Oh, the girl's restroom, *[laughter]*...

Hall: (23:20) *[laughter]*

Willmington: (23:21) in the parking lot, it was, I mean, every now and then new faculty members come in they say, "You know, sort of a turf battle now." I said, "Listen," I said, "this is Korean War." I said, "I was in World War II." And when we came, this thing was growing so fast, the ministry, that I think Jerry, every morning he got up and figured out where it had grown during the night get on top of it. And so they kept moving us around. In fact, my office was moved four times. The Bible Institute was moved ten times. We never paid our rent so we kept moving. And so, but that, those were uh...let me just say this, when I was trying to make up my mind whether I should go or not uh...come, Doug Oldham, and he just recently went to be with the Lord, took me to breakfast at Holiday Inn, that was the only restaurant, I think, in town back then, he said, "Well," he said, "are you coming?" I said, "I, I'm certainly thinking about it." And he said, "Well, I hope you do." He said, "Everybody wants you to come but do us a favor, do yourself a favor. Don't come unless you know who you are and why you've come." I thought, "That's crazy advice." And I said, "Ok," and didn't think anything. And I got

here, it wasn't a couple of weeks later, and as I say, turf wars and everybody would come...BAIK; Boy Am I Konfused, with a K. And I said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute now. Who are you?" "Well I'm a sinner save by grace. I'm glad you asked." "Why have you come here?" And I remember I told Jerry, "I will come here to help you carry out the second part of the Great Commission; reaching and teaching. You do the reaching and I'll help you do the teaching." And that was, gentlemen, thirty-nine years ago and that has done me in good stead because, you know, you possibly found out this is not exactly a perfect place. It's a great place but whenever those, those bad moments happen, I, that, I take refuge in that.

Hall: (25:24) Now, how many students actually were enrolled in the institute to begin with?

Willmington: (25:28) It started with fifty-two.

Hall: (25:29) Fifty-two...

Willmington: (25:30) Yes.

Hall: (25:31) Did it go rapidly at that point?

Willmington: (25:33) Well, it rapidly built to about two hundred and fifty and that's the most that we've ever had in one semester. The Bible Institute, like the seminary, of course the seminary's much bigger now, for many years averaged around two hundred because, and I understand ninety-five percent of the budget went to, to uh...to the, to the University, and so, but in nineteen sixty...let's see, 1974, or five, we had total six hundred and fifty in the entire student body and I had one third of them. And so, but that time wanted and so, uh...we've averaged, it's way down now, campus program, because

we're on DLP so I, right now I have about seven hundred students taking it on DLP.

Very small campus program though.

Miller: (26:25) So what, what has been, through the years, the intention of the institute?

How does it differ, if a, if a student was living out in Illinois and was going to come to Lynchburg in those early '70s there, what would determine whether he went to the institute or started as a college student, maybe even majoring in Bible or religion?

Willmington: (26:45) Bible, yes, yeah, very good question; we had that often. I said, "Well, here's the difference." I said, "The University curriculum definitely, whether it's Bible or biology, etcetera, is based on the Bible. Has been, as far I'm concerned still is. But," I said, "our curriculum is not based on the Bible, it is the Bible. And so if you want to...know you're not interested in coming back to, maybe you've had a year of college or you're a businessman or God's called you to preach later on in life and you don't have to, especially excited to come to a good college like this and dissect frogs in biology, you want only Bible, this is for you. And so it's a eighteen to sixty," it used to be seventy-two, we have it down to sixty, "seventy-two hour program where we take you through the entire Old Testament, New Testament, systematic theology, and then along with various electives."

Hall: (27:45) Were most of these students uh...people who had already grad, graduated from college or were they...

Willmington: (27:52) Well, it's to say it's a mixture. In fact I should have brought with me to show you one of our promotions. We had thirty-five pictures, small pictures. At the end it said, "They come from all walks of life to study the Word of life," and they were from A to Z, accountant and electrician, etcetera. During that semester, thirty-two

different occupations. We've had Ph.D.'s, we've had grade school dropouts that really struggled during the two years when we helped them to get the uh...what do they call that, equivalent uh...

Miller: (28:28) GED?

Willmington: (28:29) GED, yes. And so we've had from all walks of life.

Miller: (28:34) And so I, I guess the idea that the Bible Institute is only for those who couldn't make it in a full four year college program, in some cases...I guess I do know of a gentleman who was an air traffic controller who just wanted to study...

Willmington: (28:50) Yes, yes.

Miller: (28:51) the Bible more, so is it pretty evenly divided between those who um...well, tell, tell us some of the different groups. There's those who want practical training just to be an active layman in a church, there's those who struggle academically and, and would have a hard time with college, and you also, sounds like you have some that are maybe already in, in their careers and invest but they, they want to just further their knowledge of the Bible even though they are a very intelligent and successful person in another field.

Willmington: (29:23) Let me just say this, yes, that a number of the students, the two year program, when they finish they said, "You know, this is fun. We'll transfer," I guess they call them convert now, "X number of credits from the Bible Institute into Liberty University for a B.A. or a B.S. program." So Barbara Boothe, she's my buddy, and for years she tracked those students that graduated from the Bible Institute coming into the University and whatever ICE, whatever institute challenge tests they had to take, we won't have to take them now but back then they did ICE test, our students actually

faired better because that's all they, in other words, I'll put any of those up back then and today with any test they might have on the Old Testament, New Testament, or systematic theology.

Miller: (30:13) So today now, are the credits for the institute just comparable college credits or do you not do that direct one to one comparison?

Willmington: (30:24) I think, no, I think it's, it's across the board and they keep changing this but I think up to fifty, fifty-four, fifty-five hours, depends on uh...because electives we do, we didn't have church history as elective and archeology, etcetera, and all these courses were taught by men that, from the college and seminary I hired that had, you know, academic degrees, etcetera, and so, but there's been a very happy marriage between, union between the institute and, and the B.A. and B.S. program.

Miller: (30:57) Now, here at Liberty there is a certain doctrinal stand and belief. And I think our doctrinal statement itself is pretty short but there is a number of positions that we take; we're pre-Millennial, pre-Tribulational, we're non-charismatic, we believe in the complementarian rather than the egalitarian view when it comes to the role of women. Did you have a part in really forging what that broader doctrinal position was or were you just in agreement with what Jerry...did Jerry Falwell determine that? Who determined what we believe about X, Y, Z issues?

Willmington: (31:40) Both. Elmer...Jerry asked Elmer and I, and I can't remember when, it must, it was, it wasn't in '72, maybe in '73 or '74, to come up with an official doctrinal statement of the, of, back then, Lynchburg Baptist College. So we borrowed a lot of it. In fact, we took the doctrinal statement at Thomas Road Baptist Church and we worked on it. And that did us in good stead and then a few years later, I think Dan

Mitchell was involved, and so they did a little changing. And then just recently the chancellor asked us, Elmer and, let's see, myself and Ron Hawkins and someone else to reexamine it again and come up with...clean it up, make sure it's exactly what it should be and then the chancellor presented us to the board and approved it. So that was, that was last year.

Miller: (32:43) And um...have there been any things that were in the actual doctrinal statement that have been dropped or modified?

Willmington: (32:53) No. There has been positions. For example, I'm not talking at a school, I think it's safe to say and I think Dr. Falwell would have agreed that we were more or less, maybe not all, but anti-charismatic. And then Dr. Falwell, and again, this is public history, took over PTL. And then he said, and I agreed because I was changing somewhat also because we were teaching students that did have the charismatic background, that we are not anti, we are non-charismatic in our approach and there is all the difference in the world to that because we have eleven thousand students and I'm sure that, I don't know how many, be a small percentage, but I, I'm, I know that there's some that would take a different position. So it's like Paul said, "Speaking the truth in love."

Miller: (33:54) Now before we leave the doctrinal statement and talking about this, you, you happen to mention even in the church situation you were in kind of the conflict between the Billy Graham side and John R. Rice side, in those early days it seemed as though Dr. Falwell had kind of hitched his sail, so to speak, to the, to the John R. Rice...

Willmington: (34:16) John R. Rice, yes he did.

Miller: (34:17) you know, John Rawlings that...

Willmington: (34:18) Yes, yeah.

Miller: (34:19) you know, that group over there and yet in those days Bob Jones University was, you know, very strong in secondary separation and things like...could you, could you talk about the whole separation issue and it seems as though Liberty has come to more of what you might call a conservative Evangelical position rather than what you might call a militant Fundamentalist position. Could you talk about that?

Willmington: (34:43) Yes, I think I um...Jerry could all, had all, at all times could be classified as a Fundamentalist without all the Fundamentalist hang-ups; in dress code, for example, and, and second degree separation. You know, some, bless their hearts, some people, "If you watch or you allow your children to watch Billy Graham on television, that's second degree separation and you're probably on your way to hell," and Jerry just never did buy into that. Now, as far as doctrinal statement, I think some of the, the school that he graduated from, a great school and everything, some of the, the position there was Baptist bride only and so he was never that and closed communion, we were never that either but I think all in all, yes, I think his position was a healthy position.

Miller: (35:40) And um...so just to clarify that Baptist bride idea was that God only has one bride and it's...

Willmington: (35:45) Yes, yes.

Miller: (35:46) a Baptist bride. That, that was [*laughter*] the...

Willmington: (35:47) In fact, some of them actually go so far as to say that everybody, at the Rapture, will be taken up and they will join the Baptist bride church before...I remember B.R. Lakin used to come in and say, "Well, if that's the case it'll be a mighty skinny bride."

Hall: (36:01) [*laughter*]

Miller: [*laughter*]

Willmington: (36:02) I remember him saying that and so...

Hall: (36:04) Now going back to the beginnings here, the curriculum of your institute, did you write all the curriculum or who...

Willmington: (36:08) Yes.

Hall: (36:10) Did somebody help you or what?

Willmington: (36:11) Pretty well as to say there's four semesters and so the first year, the first semester we go through one third of the Old Testament, the second semester one third of the New Testament, third semester one third of systematic theology. And then there are electives. So I didn't do any of the electives. I hired men from the seminary and the University and we paid them, they signed contracts to do all the electives. But yes, I, I, for better, for worse, I came up with all that information.

Hall: (36:43) Now, did you have other staff members at this time or professors within the institute?

Willmington: (36:47) Yes, I had three or four fulltime to help me and then...and we haven't mentioned this and I, I glanced through the list of questions that we might be uh...confronted with, we haven't talked about the Liberty Home Bible Institute. In the, in the, in December in 1975, we had a banquet and I was talking to Dr. Falwell and he said, "How's the school going?" I said, "Fine, we got a couple hundred students." And I said, "I keep hearing from people who can't come and they see you on television, 'Wow, we'd like to come to your school but we can't come. Do you have a correspondence program?'" He said, "What are you telling them?" I said, "No we don't." "No, you can't do that." And I said, "Well, I'd tell them to go to write Moody Bible Institute."

“No, no, we can’t do that,” he said. “We need to start one.” And without thinking I said, “Well, that’s a pretty good idea.” And he didn’t say anything, then after dessert he said, “Well, I got to go,” he said, “you start it.” And so, [*laughter*] and so at any rate, in February of 1976, we had a seven minute infomercial on...that’s when we were really in the heyday of television. And, “Well Dr. Willmington, I see we’ve come up with something new. What’s this going to be?” “Well Jerry, I’m, I’m glad you asked.” I held up a pamphlet, it was blank, and I said, “This tells us about a brand new program; the Liberty Home Bible Institute. It’s sort of a, a mobile correspondence course. Get all the credit that you have here,” etcetera. And so, at any rate, then I decided after that uh...he said, “Ok, now, let’s start it in September.” And back then it was semester to semester, like it is today now you can take it anytime. So I wound up with uh...doing eighty, forty-five minute Old Testament lectures, this is on audio, or yeah, on tapes, back then cassette tapes, and eighty forty-five minute New Testament, eighty forty-five minute systematic theology; three hundred, or two hundred and forty. And I’ll tell you, if I hiccup during that time, I, I don’t think we’d have made it because by September we had just enough to get started. And back then they charged a thousand dollars, which is a lot of money, and I said, “Dear God, we’ve got to have at least fifty.” And Jerry, “Oh,” he said, “where’s your faith? We’re going to have more than that.” And I said, “We’ll see. That’s a lot of money and I don’t know whether they buy my stuff or not.” September, we had seven hundred and then we was uh...off and running after that. So today, 1976, today we have a hundred and two thousand individuals that have taken or are taking Liberty Home Bible Institute from every state in the Union and thirty-nine foreign countries.

Miller: (39:44) One hundred and two thousand?

Willmington: (39:46) One hundred and two thousand, yes.

Hall: (39:48) Now...

Miller: And, and so when you recorded those three sets of eighty, were those recorded classroom lectures or did you sit down in a studio and record those?

Willmington: (40:00) I sat down in a studio like this and I kept falling asleep. I said, "This is not going to work." And so there's a little church, Calvary Cross, I think, Baptist Church, near the stadium, you know, and so I knew the pastor there. I said, "I'll tell you what, you've got a beautiful little sanctuary and I think acoustically it'll work. If I can borrow that a few hours a day for several months, I'll give you everything I've written and a few things I wish I'd written." So he said, "That's fine." So I got, I stood up, I got from behind the pulpit, and when Roy Newman, who did all the taping, pushed that button like that, I thought, "Now this place is filled with people that have come thousands of miles just to hear me preach." And so I got fired up and that's how I did it.

Miller: (40:47) And were they originally recorded on reel to reel tape...

Willmington: (40:49) Yes.

Miller: (40:50) and duplicated into cassettes?

Willmington: (40:51) And duplicated, yes, yes.

Miller: (40:53) And, so really this was the first distance program that Liberty University had.

Willmington: (40:59) Absolutely, the very first, yeah.

Miller: (41:01) And, now, at some point in the future did they ever go to a video recording? Are they still using today, the students, those old reel to reel tapes that you...

Willmington: (41:13) Oh no, they, no, they uh...you know, when you...you learn to do something after you've done it and I could, I just, I would cringe when I think about this, I referred to Jimmy Carter, you know, President Jimmy Carter. So ninety-five percent was pretty, you know, basic but five percent that was, unless you were there, so it dated it. And so they, a few years ago, I think, the powers that be hired four or five and people that sat and listened to that nonsense and cleaned it up completely and transferred it from cassettes to CDs. Now, we don't have it in, in video although I have made in, in from our station here, Jerry Falwell studio, I've made a hundred, years ago, a hundred and eight twenty-three minute overviews of theology and I just finished, last year, ninety-six video overviews on the Old Testament. And now they're wanting me to do the Life of Christ and then maybe later on the New Testament. They use those on our station, our video station or our radio, our television station and I don't know whether they'll ever use those for the Liberty Home. I guess it's the old idea, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," and so they're making it ok that way.

Hall: (42:45) So those were mainly for the television stations, not for the curriculum of the...

Willmington: (42:50) They were what?

Hall: (42:51) They were mainly for the television station and not for the curriculum...

Willmington: (42:55) Yes, yes, right.

Hall: (42:56) Ok.

Willmington: (42:57) We, we just wondered what to do when we started and so, but we just, I said, "Well, I'll get it done," and it's in the can and we'll see.

Miller: (43:03) Now, don't you also have a Bible hot seat program?

Willmington: (43:06) Well, Elmer and I, we've done that from time to time. We've made about sixty, you know, it's hard keeping that guy straight. He says that, I think, about me. But yeah, we've done this in various churches where we'll take the subject of prophecy and then we have a host, usually the pastor, I think we've done it a number of times here at Thomas Road, of course, and we discuss and we get into arguments on great theological questions, like did Adam have a belly button?, you know, things like that and, and, or is the anti-Christ, will he be a homosexual?, will he be a Jew? And so we sort of bounce off each other and apparently it's, it's gone quite well, so. We still remain good friends.

Miller: (43:46) People like that uh...

Willmington: (43:48) Yeah, yeah.

Miller: (43:49) interchange there. Now, has there been anything through the years that you've had a disagreement with either Dr. Falwell, Dr. Towns? Are there any areas that um...well, one believes one way, one believes another way?

Willmington: (44:04) I don't think so. Maybe, you know, I would have certainly done certain things differently, maybe in how they were done, maybe inviting certain people here but basically no, no. I, I look back and I could uh...because I knew the man, I knew his heart. Some really criticized him but I think he got snickered into that, when Jesse Jackson, for example, spoke a few minutes in Thomas Road but, but that, that was, that wasn't his plan, etcetera. And so, or when Ted Kennedy came here. What they didn't understand, Teddy, Ted Kennedy didn't come to the church. Ted Kennedy was invited by the political people here, originally, to do a debate with Jack Kemp and they were going to both be at the same time. Well Kennedy said, "No, I'll debate liberalism but I

want to do it alone. And then Kemp can come next week.” And so I don’t, I don’t blame Jerry. He thought, “Yeah, that’d be ok.” So Kennedy came and you had, you had everybody from the moon and their cameras and everything from, I think a crew here from London, etcetera, etcetera, you know, and so, but I thought it was a good meeting. Well, Kemp couldn’t arrange his schedule to come until a month later. When he came, I think we had one little camera from WRVL. And he said, “Well now, liberal uh...liberal Bible uh...liberal university now has,” you know, “they’ve had Kennedy,” etcetera. Well that wasn’t how it was planned. So Kennedy never, he may have seen the inside of the church but he never, he never spoke there.

Miller: (45:46) One other doctrinal issue. The whole Calvinism versus Arminianism thing, how has that been through the years?

Wilmington: (45:53) Checkered...

Miller: (45:54) [*laughter*]

Wilmington: (45:55) I think um...you know, between A and Z uh...there’s two extreme positions and I think various teachers hold various views. I’ll tell you what mine is in about three minutes. A is that before the foundation of the world, God foresaw, forse...he foresaw a group of people that if he elected those, they would bring him the most amount of glory and, regardless what they done, and that’s the position that the Calvinist would hold. In other words, my brother Gordon is saved but if Gordon was not saved and I was, am saved, they would say Gordon might have been a better man than you but God saw that if I elect Harold I’ll get more glory than if I elected Gordon. Well, I totally reject that. The other view, and that’s Z, and there’s a lot of in between here, is that no, no, nothing like that, God did some crystal ball gazing and He saw that if I had

the chance to accept Him then He wrote my name down. So it was a crystal ball and it, the clouds, you know, clears away and He sees this young kid, sixteen years old, walking forward in a little Southern Baptist church in Mount Vern, Vernon, Illinois and He said, "Who, would you believe it?" To the recording angel, "This is Willmington. Who would have thought? Put his name down." I reject that. So, but I reject both and I'm probably like a D, E, Fer, just, how many cups of coffee I've had, but I leave it up to God. And so I think that for the most part, I think our students or I think our teachers would definitely be more on the Z than the A. And there's been a few times when some have been on the A side and it has cause some problems so Jerry said, "We're not going to do that." And he said, "I have noticed this, that the more doors you knock on, the more elect people you find." And so uh...

Miller: (48:04) So, so Dr. Falwell would reject what you might call hyper-Calvinism?

Willmington: (48:08) Definitely would, yes, yes. And I think he was strong on the sovereignty of God and I think he would shy away from the Z which says, in essence, that, really, God has...

Miller: (48:18) It's totally your choice.

Willmington: (48:20) Yeah, God has nothing to do whatsoever, he's ringing his hands...

Miller: (48:22) It's all freewill of man.

Willmington: (48:23) Yeah, that's right. And, "Oh, I just hope," no. He's involved in this but how, I don't know. So that's uh...now, I don't think that's been...and I don't think the charismatic's been an issue either. And certainly inspiration hasn't or I'd leave, you know. And I think the historicity, the first eleven chapters in Genesis, etcetera, I think, over the years, we've done quite well theologically. We've been trained.

Miller: (48:52) For the students that are in the institute, especially the Liberty Home Bible Institute, I almost get the sense that they feel like they're a part of the ministry. Have some of them kind of considered you to be their pastor, their pastor teacher so to speak...

Willmington: (49:06) Well, for better, for worse, yes, yes. It's, it's amazing, it just is humbling. Of course, I believe God has a sense of humor using any of us, of the testimonies that uh...just to give you one example that I've received. One noontime the mail came and I got this letter and it was on five cent paper, you know, real pulp paper with the big yellow lines, and she said, "Dear Dr. Willmington," she said, "Let me begin by saying I'm an ugly old maid and," her words, and she said, "I dropped out of school in Kentucky and I was," I think, "twelve years old." And she said, "But I wanted to know about the Bible and I signed up for the Liberty Home Bible Institute and what a blessing it's been." And went on to say a few more things and, "sincerely," and put her name down. And I noticed that through the letter there, there was some tracks, like an animal had walked it. And she said, "P.S. If you're wondering about the tracks, I'm writing this letter at breakfast and my pet raccoon got out, walked across my coffee saucer," and she said, "I didn't want to...the postman's coming pretty soon so take it the way it is."

[laughter] That was at noontime. The afternoon, I got a call from a very interesting individual, modulated voice and told me his name and, and he was from Texas and he said, "I just wanted to call and tell you how much I appreciate the Liberty Home Bible Institute and, and I'm a student and I use this material in my teaching." I said, "Oh, are you a pastor?" "No, no. No, no." He said, "I teach a little Sunday school here in, in Houston," I think. And I said, "What do you do?" And he said, "Well," he said, "I'm the

head of the mathematic department in the University of Texas,” or something like that.

And I thought, “The same day the little old maid and a, a...the Bible must be the word of God to bring in both of those.”

Hall: (51:13) How does the technology changed over the years? It went from the cassette to the CD, is there anything beyond that?

Willmington: (51:20) Yes, it’s an iPad now...

Hall: (51:21) iPad, ok...

Willmington: (51:22) or iPod or whatever you have. The only thing I know about a computer, I know how to spell, it begins with a K.

Hall: (51:27) [*laughter*]

Willmington: (51:28) And so, but yeah, you can buy and put in your ear there. And basically, that’s been um...for, of course, University, we’re, they’re ahead, you know, light years away from us but that’s the three; from the cassette to the CD to the iPod then.

Hall: (51:42) And most students use which one now?

Willmington: (51:46) Probably, very few use the cassette. I think probably the middle one, CDs, yeah.

Hall: (51:51) Ok.

Miller: (51:52) And now, so a student enrolls for your course. They have to listen to the tapes. Is there any other works, are there worksheets, are there tests? Tell us a little bit about how that goes.

Willmington: (52:02) All of that, yes. Yes, there’s six workbooks and we hired a professional person to do this years ago. There’s program learning sheets, scope and

sequence sequence, um...you know, practice tests, the whole...everything that they have at the University, I think, and so...

Miller: (52:22) Now, back in the early days you were saying, “Why did they pick a price point of a thousand dollars?” Was it to help raise funds for the ministry in addition to just paying the course of the duplicating and things?

Willmington: (52:35) You’ve got it.

Miller: (52:36) [*laughter*]

Willmington: [*laughter*] You’ve got...there is an apocryphal story that a little kid in Lynchburg swallowed a fifty cent piece and of course you can imagine the, the panicking of his mother. And, supposedly, she called 911, they came, she told them what happened. So they were loading him into their vehicle and they said, “Now, should we take him to Lynchburg Hospital or Thomas Road?” [*laughter*]

Miller: (53:04) [*laughter*]

Hall: [*laughter*]

Willmington: (53:05) And so, that may not have happened. Yes and, and I was honored that would happen because then that would help buy more television stations and hopefully get more students interested in the Bible.

Miller: (53:19) So now the, you know, whatever cost of duplication and things, those, those things have all been covered years and years ago and you have some certain basic core costs, but where do the profits from it go now? Is it still going to the general fund or does is...where, where does it go?

Willmington: (53:35) You know, I’m not privy with that. The marketing handles that. Of course in Dr. Falwell’s time, he’d rob Peter to pay Paul. So whatever the need was,

but now it's, it's more formalized because, you know, the king is dead, long live the two princes, you know. So I think that basically most of it...there is some profit, I think, I'm sure, goes into the cost of, maybe, trying to even improve the, the program itself.

Hall: (54:04) Now when those get their certificates, some of them come to campus to and to graduation...

Willmington: (54:08) Yes, most of them...now as I say, it's been ninety-five percent of the hundred thousand, maybe ninety percent of the hundred and three thousand, hundred and two thousand take it not to get credit for it, they take it like you'd by a, an Encyclopedia Britannica, for reference. And I did a study and that was years ago, probably more than that, fifteen thousand, fifteen thousand pastors have taken or are taking it. Now, a lot of them are college graduates or seminary. They just want a refresher and, well, this is a different way to say this. So I would say probably seven or eight thousand over the years, maybe, well, even more than that. Probably ten to twelve thousand have decided to take it for credit and of that ten or twelve thousand though, probably, maybe fifteen hundred to two thousand would decide to come here, instead of mailing the diploma to him, come here and graduate and walk across the, the stage and receive their diploma from Dr. Falwell back then.

Hall: (55:13) How many active students do you have now in the Home Bible?

Willmington: (55:16) I don't know that right now. It's usually about five to seven percent, I think, of the total number, so...

Miller: (55:25) Now, as far as...that's an awful lot of material, that you have three eighty, you know, sets of eighty for the Old Testament and New Testament. You have written your books, the *Willmington's Guide to the Bible*, the *Willmington Book of Bible*

Lists, and so forth. Where did you originally come up with this material and are you continually studying or did you kind of do that back then? Were the, some of these your class notes? Where, where did you get the core of that content that you taught?

Willmington: (55:59) Years ago when I pastored my first church after we got married in Mansfield, I taught a Sunday school class, preached on Sunday morning, I had a Bible class in the, in the evening before the, and I preached the morning, or the evening message, and I had another Bible class on Wednesday, five times, and the first few weeks I ran out of material. And I thought, "Now, I've got to do something here." So I took sixty-six sheets of paper and I put a Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and I said, "Now, I'm going to this week," or maybe this couple of days, "I'm going to put down everything on this one sheet of paper that I think I should know as a pastor, as a Bible teacher about the book of Genesis." And that was fun. So I did that and I went to Exodus, Leviticus, and it was pretty hard when I come to Isaiah, it was a breeze when I come to Obadiah. And when I finished, I had sixty-six sheets. And I thought, "Wow," and I carried them around with me and then I said, "I'll do the same thing with systematic theology." So I took twelve more sheets. What I need to know about the trinity, the doctrine, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, etcetera. So I had the sixty-six, seventy-eight sheets and everything that I have done from that point on, that was back in, in nineteen um...nineteen seventy, nineteen, in, in the mid '60s, everything I have done is just an application of that and I continue to do that today.

Miller: (57:30) Now, do, are you familiar with Greek and Hebrew? Do you read the original language?

Willmington: (57:35) No. I had, I had three years of Greek and, two years in college...one year in college and two years in...yeah, three years of Greek, college and seminary, and it's like anything else, use it or lose it and I never, I just, I got good grades, I just memorized all the verbs and everything, I, to my shame, could never see the practical uses of it. And so as a result, of course I've read the Bible through so many times and I guess I don't have to, maybe I can trust my judgment on interpreting but, and Hebrew, no. I've had no Hebrew.

Miller: (58:12) And so you've been what we would call English Bible. That's...

Willmington: (58:15) Yes, English Bible, yes.

Miller: (58:16) And so now when and under what circumstances was the institute named to the Willmington School of the Bible.

Willmington: (58:23) Well, Jerry said, several years before his death, he said, "I think we need to...institute, that means, you know, for crazy people," which it doesn't but, he said that we need to change it and I said, "Ok, I've been thinking. What about, I like the School of the Scriptures?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "What about Liberty School of Scriptures." "Nah," he said, "we got too many Liberty's around here now." I said, "What about Falwell's School of..." He said, "Get serious." "No," he said, "we're going to call it Willmington School of the Scriptures," School of the Bible, School of the Bible, sorry. And I said, "No, you can't do that." He said, "We're going to do it." And so then he announced it to, to the, we used to have, every other week we'd have, in the athletic building, upstairs, right before chapel, we'd have a chancellors meeting and about fifteen or twenty of the leaders there and he told us that. And I said, "Dr. Falwell," I said, "I, you know, you really shouldn't have done that." He said, "Now," he said, "the board's

approved it thirty-two to nothing.” He said, “Now quit whining.” And I said, “Yes, sir.”
And so that was his decision. And so uh...

Miller: (59:27) Now, as we look at...let’s talk about your books here now. And tell us a little bit about, you, you did tell us about the seventy-eight sheets that you had there and so they became the guide to the Willmington, the basis for the *Willmington Guide to the Bible...*

Willmington: (59:44) Yes.

Miller: (59:45) Do you then go out and use other, you know, are you reading Wiersbe and some of the other sources and things like that?

Willmington: (59:50) Oh yes, yes. I have hundreds of books in my office. My first book was *The King is Coming* and that was published in 1974 and that was a thrill. And so then I, the second book was called *That Manuscript from Outer Space* and that was what the Bible says about itself. And then the third book was the guide to the Bible and that was published in 1984 and then there was a number of books after that. I’ve written a total, that’s published books from both Nelson Publishers and Tindall, about twenty books.

Miller: (1:00:29) And, now, for your work here at Liberty, do you receive royalties for sets of the Willmington Bible that are sold and do you receive royalties on your books then?

Willmington: (1:00:42) None of the books that they sell here, no. And so, they give me a stipend on that, and so, in other words, they’re use, their, their textbook now, we’ve evolved, and marketing has decided this for the Liberty Home Bible Institute, just to use the guide to the Bible. And of course, they make a special deal with the printer and so I, I

don't need any of that and don't see any of that money but if I, if Tindall sells one of my books in a bookstore, yes, like all other offers, I uh...my wife once said, "You know," she's good, "everybody knows that authors are filthy rich." And once she said, "Now, husband," she said, "I want to know what you're doing with all this money everybody says you're making because you're not bringing it home." I said, "Well, I have this little friend in Argentina," [laughter].

Hall: (1:01:30) [laughter]

Willmington: (1:01:31) So, better mark that out [laughter], so, but...

Miller: (1:01:34) As we were talking about people who felt you were their pastor, do you have calls for counseling either from people that are having marriage problems, personal problems? Do you get calls from pastors saying, you know, "You're a pastor's pastor and can you give me some advice about the ministry," and so forth? Can you talk about, a little bit about your counseling or contact with those who have been influenced by your works?

Willmington: (1:02:00) You know, I do a little of pastors asking, usually, what about a deacon's that divorced, etcetera, but the thing that I think God has used mostly as far as me ministering to pastors and non-pastors is that two year experience that I talked about when I was, you know, sort of out of the will of God and God was taking me through some very deep waters. And when I was making the tapes, the Old Testament for Liberty Home Bible Institute, I arrived at 1 Kings chapter 17, and that's the drying brook experience where Elijah spent two years by the drying brook, and I told, I, I gave that experience and I said that, you know, I had learned a lot in various other, like the Moody Bible Institute, MBI, and Dallas Seminary, but I learned far more at the two years at the

DBI; drying broom experience. I have heard from at last five thousand and some of them have said that, you know, "That's exactly what we were going through." And this one fellow said, "I was doing the same thing that you did," and I told the story of, of one, I was sweeping the floor at midnight, they kept bumping me, the union did, sweeping the floor and then suddenly it dawned on me; I've been in the ministry ten years and I just, just shouted, "What on earth are you doing here with this miserable broom?" And it, almost as if God...and I threw it down as God spoke to me and said, "Because I put you there. Now pick that up," [laughter] you know, and I looked around and, and, but this guy wrote and then he called me and he was sobbing, he said, "I was, I was doing the very same thing and I was listening to your tape." And I said, "My, it," you know, people can relate to the misery of other people. And that has been...but at least five thousand have, have testified that and I just, I thank God everyday for it.

Hall: (1:03:55) How did the financial crisis of the '90s affect the institute?

Willmington: (1:04:02) I don't think it...well, we had a cash flow problem here and I lost, yeah, I lost two of my men. I had two fulltime men and a secretary and eventually lost all three but then I was able to hire one back shortly after that and then a secretary. So it was, it was a challenging time but it wasn't desperate as far as we were concerned. We never missed paycheck in all that time, never.

Hall: (1:04:33) Now, was there, there was one incident in which the, the, is it Household Finance? Was that...

Willmington: (1:04:39) The what?

Hall: (1:04:40) Household Finance selling the uh...

Willmington: (1:40:42) Oh yeah, well, marketing did this and I won't go into whether it was a good idea but, but back then, if you signed up for Liberty Home Bible Institute and you filled out the papers, they, and sent the papers to us, then marketing would take that, that application down to the bank and get a thousand, get...it was twelve hundred dollars, they sold for twelve hundred dollars, and they would get, they would get a check for, ministry, for twelve hundred dollars and we would put two hundred in escrow and the rest, they'd spend it. And so, then the bank said, "Well, there's just too many doing this." And so, I don't know whether Dr. Falwell even knew this, I suppose he did, but I, I was in, not involved with it at all. For a while then, Household Finance said, "We'll take it," and then they charged so much interest. And so, that was probably um...a big mistake and I, I'm sure Jerry realized that and, and he went, he resolved the problem later on.

Hall: (1:05:51) But so many of them did not really pay up...

Willmington: (1:05:54) They thought it would be much less uh...you know, that would re, that would renege on payments than what it really was, yes. So...

Hall: (1:06:05) Did, how much did the ministry lose on that deal?

Willmington: (1:06:09) It was millions. Yes, but, but they, Jerry got it all back, you know, eventually. And then, I think, Household agreed to settle, you know, X number of cents per dollar, etcetera, and so we came out of it ok.

Miller: (1:06:27) Tell us about being a contributing editor to the Liberty Bible Commentary. Which portions did you write in that commentary?

Willmington: (1:06:34) Not very many. I think I wrote a portion of the book of Acts and I can't even think of...oh, and Deuteronomy in the Old Testament and Acts in the New Testament.

Miller: (1:06:47) Now, through the years, you've been kind of known as a prophecy person. That that's been an emphasis of your ministry in addition to just the general Bible teaching, that's been kind of a specialty of yours and you said your first book was *The King is Coming* and then you had *The Signs of the Times* and all. Tell us a little bit about why do you think it's important to teach prophecy and talk a little bit about your prophecy teaching.

Willmington: (1:07:14) Well, one of the reasons is, one third of the Bible, nearly one third of the Bible is given with a prophecy. There are eleven hundred and eighty-nine chapters in the Bible, nearly four hundred talk about...many of the chapters were past prophecies but some are going on right now and some will be, you know, fulfilled in the future. So to neglect prophecy is to neglect one third of the Bible. And then prophecy can act as a comfort for people going through tribulation because in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul talks about the rapture and he said, "Where for comfort one another with these words." So, studying prophecy we know the story has a happy ending, the good guys win, and the bridegroom gets the bride. And then Jesus himself says that he is the spirit of prophecy. So there are, there are other reasons, I think, very valid reasons.

Unfortunately that had been over worked and, and there's two extremes. One is that nothing that happens is prophetic. Our Covenant people would say that, that, "May the 14, 1948 was not prophetic at all. Israel became a nation and we're glad because now we have a, we have a democratic country in all the Arab countries but as far as prophecy, no." The other extreme is that everything that happens is prophecy, you know. And you know, there's track that, that Jesus must be coming soon because the buzzards are laying more eggs there, [*laughter*] you know, in, in Israel to hatch out the buzzardettes to eat the

flesh of those soldiers that fall at, at, you know, the battle of Armageddon. So that's, that's nonsense but there's a, there's a happy, correct medium there.

Miller: (1:09:02) Now, have you ever been to the land of Israel?

Willmington: (1:09:04) Twenty-six times. Yeah, I taught over there one semester. I was invited to speak at the Americ...and to uh...serve as a special speaker at the American Institute of Holy Land Studies on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. And so, 1982, from January to May, I, I taught there.

Miller: (1:09:23) Did you ever conduct tours or did you work with Duke Westover on that or...?

Willmington: (1:09:27) Never worked with Duke but I've worked with others and yeah, we've um...of course Dr. Falwell has taken us a number of times but my wife and I, we've had about twelve tours. And through Liberty Home Bible Institute we took a number of those tours. And, and then you have to hire a guide, regardless, and then uh...I'd work with the guide and we'd lecture at the very spots, "This is what happened," etcetera, so...

Hall: (1:09:50) Now, the story goes that you put some scriptures in a cave...

Willmington: (1:09:53) That what?

Hall: (1:09:54) Put scriptures in the cave or a copy of a Bible?

Willmington: (1:09:56) Oh, there's a place we've been to a number of times called Petra and it's twenty, it's about sixty miles south of the Dead Sea in Jordan. And so, many believe, there are passages that indicate that, that this is where the Jews will hide out, at least some of them, during the Great Tribulation. And Petra is an amazing city. It's the only city in existence, I think, where the only entrance is through a series of corridors,

some the, the cliffs are, maybe, eight hundred to a thousand feet high and sometimes only fifty or sixty feet wide, and a whole regime could hold off a whole army. And there are all kinds of caves, there's forty square miles once you get inside and there are thousands of caves where, I think, the Christians lived for a while there, and then the Romans built some streets there. And so in the 1890's there was a guy name W.E. Blackstone and he was a prophecy teacher. He went over there and he buried, and he buried New Testaments for those who, he felt the Jews would be there and they could find it and read it while they're waiting for Jesus to come. And so we went over there and, a number of times, and we buried entire Bibles and so hopefully...wrapped them in cellophane and said, "This has been placed here by the such and such by the students and we have prayed for you and we encourage you to read the following," then I give Matthew 24 and 25, etcetera. And so, I guess they're still there unless some Arab has fished one out and said, "This is the original Bible that the apostle Paul used? And so, Simon and Peter covered the maps," you know, so...

Miller: (1:11:44) [*laughter*] Now, have you had a personal relationship with Dr. Tim LaHaye through the years?

Willmington: (1:11:50) Probably not as many times as I would have hoped. We've had lunch together several times and conversed and, and he knows my son and so...and then I, years ago he was president of a, of a school in California so I was invited out there and spoke at their, their college and then I spent some time with him, yes.

Miller: (1:12:13) Now, we've spoken a little bit about your friendship before with Dr. Elmer Towns, that you got to know him even before you had a connection with Liberty

and all, that you knew him before you knew who Jerry Falwell was. How about Dr. Pierre Guillermin?

Willmington: (1:12:28) Yes, I met Pierre, of course Pierre came before I did and then he left and then I came in '72 and then they invited Pierre back, I believe it was in '74, or '73 or '74, and he was there until he resigned many years later. And so yes, I've had many, you know, pleasant meetings with him and lunch and etcetera.

Miller: (1:12:52) Now, was, through the years when you've had the, the, what's now become the Willmington School of the Bible or the, the Bible Institute, were you under the administrative control of the academic office here or were you kind of your own entity?

Willmington: (1:13:10) Both and they've never bothered us, you know. They just say, "You do your thing and if we can help you, why..." so, it's uh...I've never felt like, got big brother over me and I, I appreciate that.

Miller: (1:13:22) Now, so Dr. Guillermin left, Dr. Towns left, so for a while there, both of the men were gone and you were here.

Willmington: (1:13:30) Yeah, I was here. So I always kidded them, I said, "You know, just remember gentlemen, I'm not a member of the 'I came back' club."

Miller: (1:13:38) *[laughter]*

Willmington: (1:13:39) We had about half our people now that, I think, that left and came back for various reasons and so...

Miller: (1:13:44) And, and what were some of those reasons that people left?

Willmington: (1:13:46) Dr. Towns left for various reasons, one of the reasons is to help Curt Hutson establish what became known as, what's that, Bible...

Miller: (1:13:59) Baptist University...

Willmington: (1:14:00) Baptist University...

Miller: (1:14:01) of America, I think.

Willmington: (1:14:02) of America, yes, and he was there for several years. Pierre left, he had a little financial advising business before he came here and then I think he decided to go back to that for a while. So there, there was other reasons but those, those were two reasons that I know of.

Hall: (1:14:21) Did you know any other people, like Sumner Wemp, before you came here or...?

Willmington: (1:14:25) No, I did not...

Hall: (1:14:26) Ok.

Willmington: (1:14:27) I just called Sumner Wemp recently, this is in August, and his wife died last week, I guess, and he's, he's doing...he's nearly ninety. No, I met him...he was a wild man [*laughter*] and he was a great blessing to uh...he was spiritual life director for a number of years. So I met him when I came here.

Hall: (1:14:47) Any special relationship with Ed Dobson?

Willmington: (1:14:50) Yes. I used to call him the little leprechaun and, yeah, Eddie, I was first person to meet him. My wife and I met he and **Laura** at the airport and they came in '73, 1973, I think, and so we had lunch with him and, and so yeah, we've been friends ever since.

Miller: (1:15:09) Now, you're getting up in years. We've talked to some that are, that have no plans to retire from Liberty. Other ones um...what are, what are your plans for the future?

Willmington: (1:15:22) When I was, tuned seventy-five the staff threw a little get together for me and coffee and cake and ice cream in my office and Dr. Falwell found out about it and there was food there so he came. Of course he comes in, he gets a chair and he sits down, and he pontificates as people come in. But I was honored that he would come and he said, "Harold, how long you been here?" I said, he said, "I'll answer that, 1972." I said, "Yes, sir." "Well," he said, "I've asked God to give us another fifteen years and then our boys will help us up on our horses when we're off in the sunset. So if you promise not to quit, I'll promise not to fire you." And then I said...we, we shook on it. When I was seventy-seven, you know I'm seventy-eight now, when I was seventy-seven, April the 7, I wrote, Jerry was with the Lord, so I wrote the, the new chancellor and I told him about the agreement. I said, "Now, I know there's a, a new man in the White House now and I just wondered what, what the situation is." And in essence, he wrote write back, "You know I'm a lawyer and everything." He said, "You shouldn't put it in writing." He said, "I have, I have you, I'm going to hold you to it." So I'm seventy-eight and so I'll be ninety-three if, I don't think I'm going to be around that long but I don't know. No, I have no...I don't know what I'd do. I have no...Jerry used to say, "You don't resign or retire from something that, that you love doing." Now I come down with leprosy or something, why, yes, I'll have to retire.

Miller: (1:16:51) Now, once the course was completed and you had all of those tapes recorded, then what was your function or role through those years? You continued, you, you taught courses...

Willmington: (1:17:05) Yes.

Miller: (1:17:06) in person there but are you continuing to teach in the classroom at all?

Willmington: (1:17:09) Yes, yes. Not as much now but yes I am.

Miller: (1:17:11) And so, if students want to come and be a residential student of the Bible Institute, is that still open?

Willmington: (1:17:19) Yes, now it's to say we've dropped from about two hundred and fifty at an all-time high to just a few dozen. And that really hurts me but I understand this is the twenty-first century. It's much easier to take it online. They get the same material but I don't have the, you know, that day by day with them uh...contact, but yes, we in fact, we strongly encourage them to come.

Hall: (1:17:42) So far then the, the online part of it is, the institute, it's not connected with the Liberty Online, University online program?

Willmington: (1:17:53) You know, I don't know how that works but I think it is because they get the same credit and everything. And the online Liberty, they handle that. They got a section so it's basically, it's one of the, one of the rooms I guess we should say.

Miller: (1:18:08) Now, I thought I saw an ad here fairly recently that you were offering, to churches, you can have your own home or your own church...

Willmington: (1:18:18) Yes, yes, yes.

Miller: (1:18:19) Bible Institute, you can brand it with your church name and things like that. Tell us a little about that program.

Willmington: (1:18:23) Yes, well, that's a little different, yes, from...it's apart from, although we cooperate with the University. We just started that and we call it Willmington Church Bible Institute. I didn't want to call it Willmington but they said, "No, your name is well-known." So, it's sort of a turnkey program, we just started it, where we can show a pastor how to start, how to preside over his own Bible institute and

it's all online. It's being put online now, so there's very few churches that have bought into it because we got to get it done. It'll be another year, probably, year before we get it all done. And it will be about seven thousand pages of information and, and a lot of new stuff. And then once they...and then I, the pastor will serve as the president, or whoever he assigns, I will serve as the aca...as the advisory dean. So there's no official tie in here which means I give my advice when asked for, and then at completion we are trying to, I think, the people that are handling this, to work in something with the, the University to help bump their crop where that students that graduate from there, because they'd have to listen to all the tapes, etcetera, and they're new, this is different stuff from Liberty Home, and they'll be able to, maybe without even taking ICE tests, convert to some credits, save them a lot of money.

Miller: (1:19:49) And do you have some churches already that have expressed interest?

Willmington: (1:19:52) Yes, yes we just, several dozen that are doing this now and as I say, it's, these are the pioneering churches and there's a lot of kinks to work out.

Miller: (1:19:59) So now, in your seventies here now, what is kind of a typical week or month for you? What, what are the main things that you're primarily working with these days?

Willmington: (1:20:11) I don't get up at six in the morning like I used to. I started rhyming my birthdays when I was seventy-five; seventy-five still alive, seventy-six in a fix, seventy-seven on my way to heaven, seventy-eight the very gate, seventy-nine, that's next year, begging for more time, and eighty weighty and the only thing I can figure out that rhymes with eighty is, is weighty, is my, my stomach. So, but I want to...a typical day is uh...I'm working on several new books now and then, this isn't out right now, but

Dr. uh...Jonathan has asked me to do something every Sunday that will take a lot of my time and studying for and I think that will be announced soon.

Hall: (1:20:57) Going back to your, the, the books, which ones sold the most and which do you feel is most, the most important?

Willmington: (1:21:05) Ok, I always wanted to, if I could sell a half million copies and so I've done that I think. *The King is Coming* sold about three hundred and fifty thousand copies and the guide to the Bible has sold about that many. Of course it's fifty dollars a book now, that's a lot of money. And I did a book years ago called *The Bible List Book* and Billy Graham Organization decided to take three hundred thousand copies and that helped. And so, they devised this special cover and everything and so I have one cover, one book left, they sent me a copy, I wish I'd have gotten more, one. And so, one of ours, rabbit trail here, one of our uh...I'll say it in a minute...lawyers at the University is a grandson of Billy Graham. Gigi, one of Billy Graham's daughters, was his mother. And so, he goes down there and to see daddy Bill, as he calls him in Montreat, so not too long ago, he asked if we'd like to go down, Jonathan and I and Elmer. And I said, "Oh my, do we ever." And so we went down there, we met Dr. Graham and he signed my copy. And so I have, that's very precious. "To Harold and Sue," and he put, he said, "Nobody will be able to read this." And I said, "I can read it." And so, but at any rate, that's close to half a million I guess. We sold about a hundred and fifty thousand on our own and so total, you know, nothing like my roommate at Dallas Seminary. His book *The Late, Great Planet Earth* sold like thirty million copies. But I sold, all my books put together, probably about a million and a half, which is not a whole lot.

Miller: (1:22:56) Let's see, that was Harold Lindsell?

Willmington: (1:22:58) Hal Lindsey.

Miller: (1:22:59) Hal Lindsey, Hal...

Willmington: (1:23:00) Hal Lindsey, yeah, yeah. Hal Lindsey.

Hall: (1:23:02) What's the difference between the way uh...the guide to the Bible and the Bible handbook?

Willmington: (1:23:05) Yeah, the Bible handbook is uh...it's hard to explain. I treated that as a literary overview of the Bible and I found out there's approximately five thousand pages, five thousand paragraphs in the Bible, a paragraph being defined as a complete sentence, etcetera. And so I've located all five thousand paragraphs and I have put a catchy title to each one. For example, in the gospel of Matthew, the feeding of the five thousand, I have History's Greatest Fish Fry, you know, something like that. And so, and then it has personality profiles that I don't have in the guide, so that's sort of a, a literary overview. Then I've done, the most recent one is the Bible outline and it's an alliterated outline with no sad dog stories, no illustrations; just an alliterated outline with every single, of every single of the chapter, of the eight hundred, of the eleven hundred and eighty-nine chapters in the Bible. So that's sold quite well.

Hall: (1:24:06) You've done, you do a lot with the alliteration, does that come easy to you or is that something that you struggle with?

Willmington: (1:24:11) Well, sometimes it does but sometimes, you know, my wife said, "You'd alliterate a poem if you could." I said, "Well, I just think of that old proverb I heard years ago that God cannot bless an outline unless it's alliterated." So...

Hall: (1:24:24) [*laughter*]

Willmington: (1:24:25) but I hope I haven't overdone it. So, but a lot of my books I don't use alliteration, that one I did.

Miller: (1:24:31) Now, have you ever had an official position at Thomas Road Baptist Church?

Willmington: (1:24:38) No. We all, we've always been known as, those that came earlier, as the associate pastors. And so when I'm here, I don't do it so much now, but in the old church I would always come forward during the invitation and stand with the rest of the pastors, and so...

Miller: (1:24:55) And, and so, now clarify that a little bit for me. So those that came in the '70s um...we, we've heard from another person that we had interviewed that, "Well, we were all on the staff of the Thomas Road Baptist Church because it was one in the same with Liberty University in those early days." But who were some of...so, Elmer Towns would have been one of those, yourself, now, Jim Moon taught in the school in those...

Willmington: (1:25:17) Oh yes, yes.

Miller: (1:25:18) early days. Who were some of those other ones who were considered associate pastors in those early days?

Willmington: (1:25:24) Well, let's see...

Miller: (1:25:26) Like Pierre Guillermin, was he an associate pastor or, or...?

Willmington: (1:25:28) I think so. He may not have considered himself as associate, associate but we didn't, there was a lot of gray there and so if...you just worked for Jerry, you know, whether you swept floors or taught mathematics or...and so there was not exactly, not the clear-cut thing today. Yeah, most of, probably, Paul Fink and he's one of

the, in fact he's taught here almost as long as I have. And let's see um...oh, who was it...I can't think um...several others have been here for years and I'm getting tired now, I can't think. Most of the Bible teachers would have served as associate pastors I think.

Miller: (1:26:10) Did you ever have a regular Sunday school class or a regular responsibility?

Willmington: (1:26:16) I do now but I didn't back then. Sometime...I helped Jerry, I researched, helped him research many of his sermons over the years and so that was my contribution there.

Miller: (1:26:29) So how would he approach that? What, what would he say to you? "I'm going to do a sermon on Psalm 23," or whatever and...

Willmington: (1:26:36) Basically that and, or I would suggest, "You know, why don't you, why don't you do one on the book of Jude?" "Well, you got any ideas?" And so I would come up with some outlines. I did not, I've been accused of this, I did not write his sermons. Nobody puts words in his mouth, I'll tell you that. But I, I acted as a, sort of speech writer for a politician. I gave him some key points and then he would take it. And sometimes he would use it all, sometimes we wouldn't use any of it. But, in fact, I am very fortunate and honored that I helped him prepare the information for his final sermon right before he died. He was, he called me on a Friday, he said, "I'm doing a, a...it's Mother's Day and give me three mothers in the Bible and a little outline." And so, and I did it and he used, he didn't use a lot of it, he used a little of it but I thought, "Well, that was, I was honored to do that."

Hall: (1:27:33) Tell us something about your wife's work in the deaf ministry.

Willmington: (1:27:35) Ok, ok. Yes, my wife was, had learned the deaf language when I was pastoring my church in, in Indiana and it was an amazing experience the way that happened. So she came here and they had a group of about fifteen or twenty deaf people and the leader had a moral problem and just before we came. And so, they came to her and said, "Oh, wow, you can do this." And so, then later on she took it over and later Jerry put her on television, she was known as the little lady in the circle. And so, for seventeen years, then they went to closed caption, she taught the deaf and I still teach the dumb. So that's how that goes but it's amazing, when Ten Kennedy came here, he was being introduced to the faculty and he said, "I know who you are, I watch you on television." I think the only reason he did is when he was invited to come he wanted to see what the enemy was up to and so, and Francis Schaeffer, he and his wife, and we were standing and Jerry was introducing us. He said, "Harold Willmington. This is Sue Willmington." And he stood and looked at her and then he went on, "Francis, Francis Schaeffer." Came back and said, "Just a minute." He said, "I've always wanted to do something." And he said, "My wife Edith is here," and he said, to her, he said, "and your husband Harold is here so there'll be no scandal here." But he said, "You know, I have cancer and I was watching the Old Time Gospel Hour in Minneapolis at a hospital and," he said, "I saw the Old Time Gospel Hour and I said to my wife, 'There are two reasons I want to go to Thomas Road; I want to meet Dr. Falwell and I want to meet the deaf interpreter.'" And he said, "Here's what I want to do." And he walked over to her and put his arm around her and kissed her on the cheek, "Thank you for teaching the deaf." And she didn't wash her face for I don't know how long, so...but that was, yeah, she's done...now she teaches, she, since she teaches sign language to hearing students. So this

semester now she already has, coming semester, has a hundred signed up and so she has her work cut out. But she's a, she's a trooper and so...

Miller: (1:29:47) And so she continues to work with that...

Willmington: (1:29:50) Yes.

Miller: (1:29:51) What was it that originally precipitated the deaf ministry? Was it that others had done this or you had some deaf parishioners that they wanted to minister to?

Willmington: (1:30:02) And the church, one of our deacons came to me, I hadn't been there very long, he said, "We got to start..." and we were close to Jack Hyles' church and I hated that church [*laughter*]. But it was my fault, not theirs because he's picking up all my kids in my neighborhood, he'd send his buses. My wife said, "Now husband, you're the pastor and I don't want to, you know, tell you what to do but I would suppose, I would suspect if you go visit some of those kids, he'll come to our church." I said, "You're right." Well at any rate, so he came to me and they had a big deaf ministry, but he said, "Pastor," he said, "my brother and, and sister-in-law are deaf and they're coming here and we need to have a deaf ministry for them. I don't want them to go there; I want them to go here." I said, "Ok." So he said, "I want to learn it." And so, he said, "Make an announcement, we'll see..." And so I said, "How many would like to, to learn the deaf language? We'll try to get a deaf teacher." My wife said, "Eh, nothing else to do." So she raised her hand. And so Connie and Chuck, that was the husband and wife, and the brother, the deaf brother and my wife hired a, we hired him, paid X number of dollars, a deaf Roman Catholic fellow by the name of John, it was one of those names you have to sneeze at the end there, to teach the deaf language. So after about a year, they felt they knew enough to have a special service and John told them, or he signed, he

said, "I'll help you. I'll do everything but I'm Roman Catholic and don't even ask me to come here. I'll never step foot in a Protestant church." And so it came time for, was, you know, to have him in there and I thought, "There's got to be a reason. There's got to be a way I can get him in there." I said, "Chuck, tell him, John, that this is not especially," you know, it was Sunday night, "a Protestant church service. This is," um...what's the word when you...I can't think of it, uh...here, when you audition for the first time you're...somebody plays the piano and they have a...oh, what's it...oh, I can't think of the word. At any rate, it's, your teacher attends a recital...

Miller: (1:32:12) Your, your debut?

Willmington: (1:32:13) Well, it's not debut. Anyway, it's, it's expected, required of the teacher to attend the, the first, the performance of the students. He said, "Well, I can do that." He came and he was gloriously saved, gloriously saved. And a month later he was killed by a drunken driver on the Indiana, Hammond, Indiana Speedway there. And so my wife just sort of pulled over the road and said, "Ok, you want me to be fulltime in the deaf ministry." And so, as they say, the rest is...I guess I'm trying to think...well, I can't remember the word here but anyway, so she was ready to come, goal when she came here.

Hall: (1:32:56) Do you have a favorite story about Jerry Falwell?

Willmington: (1:32:59) Oh, there's so many. Yeah, one of them, I think uh...he was always uh...not beating up on but he, he was always teasing Robbie Hiner, [*speaking in high pitch*] our little singer, you know, had a voice like this when he was fifty. And, but people loved him and so, at any rate, he teased him and other things so, I didn't see this but my wife did because she used to travel and Jerry had a, a DC-3 and we called it

Jerry's bomber and it seated, I think, about thirty and so she went with him to interpret for the deaf that would come to the **Style** of America crusades. And so, at one meeting Jerry had, right before the meeting, Jerry had taken his coat off, I guess to go to the restroom. So Robbie Hiner, he had a bunch of Jesus First pins in his pocket, his left, his right pocket. And so Robbie opened it up and filled it with shaving soap, you know, and foam and everything and patted it down and everything. So Jerry, "Come on Robbie, let's go." And so, and Doug Oldham sung and, and everything and, and so he got up and he said, "How many of you have your Jesus First pin?" And he, you know, he showed them and he said, "Ok," he said, "well, some of you don't...let me show you what it looks like." And he reached in his pocket, realized immediately what had happened. He said, "Well," he said, "you've seen it and I don't have to show you." And, and he's right handed but he preached left [*laughter*], that hand in his pocket, right hand in his pocket. And so back on the plane, I tell you...

Miller: (1:34:36) [*laughter*]

Willmington: (1:34:37) she said he got him down and, "I'm sorry brother Jerry. You won't do that, I won't do it again." He said, "No you won't because you're going to die right now." And she said, "I thought sure the bottom of that plane was going to come down." So that's one of my famous uh...memories but there are so many, so many.

Miller: (1:34:52) Now, were you along on that trip or...?

Willmington: (1:34:54) No, I wasn't along on that trip.

Miller: (1:34:55) Oh, ok, your wife just told you about that there.

Willmington: (1:34:56) Yeah, yeah.

Miller: (1:34:57) But, now, did, did you have a, a personal relationship with Jerry? Did you guys have lunch? Did you...

Willmington: (1:35:05) I think as much as I could. I don't know, all men of that stature, not that they're aloof but, but they're uh...they're not going to let their hair down and, and understand that, I completely understand. As a pastor I didn't do that either. So I didn't have as...probably Elmer spent more time with him than I did but yes, I had dozens of lunches with him and, and dozens of meetings and conversations, hundreds of conversations and, and we never had a cross word. He never told me to do anything. He always said, "Are you going to be in town this Wednesday? If not, would you mind preaching at a prayer..." Well, that to me was a command but it wasn't, "Bless God, you're going to..." So anyway, we had a very, very congenial relationship.

Miller: (1:35:54) And, so as you think ahead to the future, what would you like to be, if the Lord should tarry, what would you like to have remembered as your legacy?

Willmington: (1:36:06) When I, when Jerry, when D. James Kennedy died, Jonathan and Elmer and myself flew down to represent the ministry and Great Presbyterian, you know, Coral Ridge. And so James Dobson preached the funeral and he used a passage in the book of Acts chapter 13 to describe James Dobson's life and I thought, "I've heard that before. I know where I heard it." I was on the stage when Franklin Graham preached...no, when James, was that...Jerry Vines preached at Dr. Falwell's funeral; he used the same scripture. And neither man knew the other was doing it. And I told Elmer, I said, "This is what I want to be remembered for." And the scripture, David uh...the scripture was the apostle Paul and he was on his missionary trips and he was explaining the Messiah and everything to a group of Jews and so he talked about the Old Testament

and he came to David. And this is the scripture that both men used, describing the funerals of both these men. So David served his own generation in the will of God and fell asleep with his father's...I said, "That's what I want to be remembered for." Not a faithful husband, I hope I've been that, or a loving father, a writer, an author. But Willmington attempted, I didn't serve a former generation or my son's generation but I tried to serve my own generation in the will of God. And that's all, that's all any of us, saved, sinner by grace could, could, that's what I'd like to be remembered for.

Miller: (1:37:53) One thing I, I didn't ask you about, we heard about your boy when he was three years old during your two year...

Willmington: (1:37:58) Yes, yes.

Miller: (1:37:59) difficult time there, how many children do you have all total?

Willmington: (1:38:01) I have just the one.

Miller: (1:38:03) Just the one, ok.

Willmington: (1:38:04) Yeah, and three grandchildren.

Miller: (1:38:05) And, and where does he live now?

Willmington: (1:38:07) He lives with us...

Miller: (1:38:08) Oh, ok.

Willmington: (1:38:09) Well, in our same neighborhood, yeah. He left, he was ten years, eight years he went down to help a friend, **Brian Bulloy**, establish a church in Atlanta. And when he got down there they were running about six hundred. When he left they had, at Easter they had seven thousand. So it was a huge church and then Jerry tried to get him back but he felt he should stay there and then when Dr. Falwell died,

Jonathan said, "Now look, you've got to come back. I've got to have you." So he's been back about three years and he's, he's now charge of the ministry, Thomas Road.

Miller: (1:38:43) And, and so, how, what, what is your perception of, now, Jerry Jr. and Jonathan, of their operation of the ministry?

Willmington: (1:38:54) I, and I told both of them this, I knew, I didn't think it would go down. I thought the best we can hope for, and both sides of the fence here, it would plateau. It's gone straight up. I, I don't think, I don't think Jerry would of had any idea. We've taken in, I don't know, four thousand members since Jerry died in the church and it's jumped from seven or eight thousand to eleven thousand. Chancellor said we spent millions of dollars building and haven't borrowed a penny since Dr. Falwell died. That's not the old Jerry way [*laughter*]. The old and new Jerry, the old Jerry, he'd take you into a dollar, he'd spend a dollar twenty-five. The new Jerry, he takes into a dollar, seventy-five cents. And so God has used and will use both approaches I'm sure.

Miller: (1:39:38) Well, we really appreciate your time.

Willmington: (1:39:39) Ok, ok.

Miller: (1:39:40) And with that we'll conclude today's interview with Dr. Harold Willmington. This interview has been conducted as part of the oral history project of the Liberty University archives.

[*end of interview*]